

◀ SPEARHEAD ▶

21st PANZER DIVISION

Rommel's Afrika Korps Spearhead



CHRIS ELLIS

← SPEARHEAD →

21st PANZER DIVISION

Rommel's Afrika Korps Spearhead



◀ SPEARHEAD ▶

21st PANZER DIVISION

Rommel's Afrika Korps Spearhead

Chris Ellis



Ian Allan
PUBLISHING

Previous page: Set MG 231 armoured car of 3rd
Reconnaissance Battalion on patrol early in the 1941
advance into Cyrenaica.

First published 2001

ISBN 0 7110 2853 2

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the Publisher in writing.

© Compendium Publishing 2001

Published by Ian Allan Publishing

an imprint of Ian Allan Publishing Ltd, Hershham, Surrey KT12 4RG.
Printed by Ian Allan Printing Ltd, Hershham, Surrey KT12 4RG.

Code: 0111/A2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Glossary		Stab	Staff (HQ)	Maint	Maintenance
Abteilung	Battalion/ Detachment	Stamm	Cadre	Mor	Mortar
Armee	Army	Stellung	Position/static	Mot Inf	Motorised Infantry
Artillerie	Artillery	Sturmgeschütz	Assault Gun	Mtrcl	Materiel
Aufklärung	Rece	Truppe	Troop	QM	Quartermaster
Ausbildung	Training	Versorgungstruppen	Service troops	OKW	Oberkommando
Bataillon	Battalion	Wache	Guard		der Wehrmacht
Begleit	Escort	Wehrmacht	German armed forces	OKH	Oberkommando
Einheiten	Units				des Heeres
Ersatz	Replacement	Zug	Platoon	Pak	Panzerabwehrkanone
Feldersatz	Field replacement				(anti-tank gun)
Flak	AA gun	Abbreviations		Pl	Platoon
Geschütz	Gun	AA	Anti-aircraft	PzBefWag	Panzerbefehls-
Grenadier	Rifleman	ADC	Aide de camp		wagen (armed
Heer	German Army	Arty	Artillery		comd vehicle)
Infanterie	Infantry	Atk	Anti-tank	PzGr	Panzergranadier
Kampfgruppe	Battle group	Bn	Battalion	PzJr	Panzerjäger
Kavallerie	Cavalry	Brig	Brigade	PzKpfw	Panzerkampfwagen
Kompanie	Company	Bty	Battery		tank
Kraftfahrpark	Maintenance depot	C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief	Rece	Reconnaissance
Lehr	Training	Col	Column	RA	Royal Artillery
Leichte	Light	Coy	Company	RHQ	Regimental HQ
Luftwaffe	German Air Force	DAK	Deutsches Afrika Korps	RTR	Royal Tank Regt
Motorisiert	Motorised			Sect	Section
Nachrichten	Signals	Det	Detachment	Sig	Signals
Nebelwerfer	Grenade launcher (multi-barrel)	Engr	Engineer	SP	Self-propelled
		MC	Motorcycle	Tac	Tactical
Panzergranadier	Arm'd infantry	Hy	Heavy	Tk	Tank
Panzerjäger	Anti-tank infantry	KDG	King's Dragoon Guards	Veh	Vehicle
Pionier	Engineer			WH	Wehrmacht Heer
Sanität	Medical	le FH	leichte Feldhaubitze (light field gun)		
Schütze	Rifleman	Li	Lieutenant; light		
Schwer	Heavy				

CONTENTS

1 Origins & History	6
2 Ready for War	10
3 In Action	16
4 Insignia & Markings	70
5 People	82
6 Assessment	89
7 Reference	92
Index	96

Author's Note

Any book covering the history of a military formation has its limitation. It has to veer between rather plain lists of dates and achievements, and stories of courage and excitement in battle. 21st Panzer Division was interesting primarily for its part in the North African campaign. However, the famous number was used again for one of the divisions defending the Atlantic Wall and, as it happens, the 'new' 21st Panzer Division gave further distinguished but limited service in the Normandy campaign of summer 1944. It would then go on to fight on the Eastern Front against the Russians in the last days of the war.

The war in North Africa divides neatly into two—the sparring by relatively small forces in 1941, and the bludgeoning by two much-reinforced heavyweights in 1942 and early 1943. It was easy to isolate 21st Panzer Division

actions in 1941 for many engagements were at hardly more than divisional level—and, therefore, this period is of much interest to wargamers and 'armchair tacticians'. In the 1942–43 campaigns it is much less easy to isolate the activities of a single division. So in this book I have covered the exciting small-time operations of 1941 in some detail, and used a broader brush for 1942 onwards. It would take a much bigger book than this to cover all the 1942 actions in minute detail.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Peter Chamberlain, Brian L. Davies, George Forty and Simon Forty for some of the information and many of the illustrations used in this book. The maps on page 64 are taken from Robert Kershaw's excellent *D-Day* (Ian Allan Publishing, 1985).

ORIGINS & HISTORY

Not all famous fighting formations have a long tradition of battles and campaigns stretching over many years and more than one war. Some become famous for their exploits in only one hard-fought campaign—of these, 21st Panzer Division is an excellent example. Before the year 1941 it did not exist; yet two years later it had become one of the best-known fighting divisions of the war. The spearhead of Rommel's Deutsches Afrika Korps (DAK), there was no part of the war in the Western Desert in which it did not have some involvement. In most of the notable events of the North African campaign, 21st Panzer Division was in the thick of the fighting, the key to success—or failure—in the fortunes of the DAK.

None of the activities or actions in which 21st Panzer Division became involved had been anticipated even a year before it came into existence. Prior to the outbreak of World War 2, the German High Command (differentiated in this book as OKW=command of all German forces; OKH=command of the German Army) had made no provision for operations outside Europe or Russia—in spite of the highly developed and disciplined staff tradition of the German Army which might have been expected to plan for all contingencies. There appeared to be no official appreciation by either the OKH or staff that the British and their Commonwealth forces had vast experience of colonial operations in hot and arid climates, not least in World War 1, when the British had been so active in Egypt from which they launched the campaigns in Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. Between the wars, too, British mandates in Palestine and Egypt, and peacekeeping in the Gulf states gave valuable expertise in Middle East operations. During the Abyssinian campaign by Italy in 1936, the British had even established a modest but balanced Mobile Force (based at Mersa Matruh) which provided early experience of desert operations with modern vehicles and weapons. Hence, when war was declared against Germany in September 1939, the British not only had a useful tradition of desert fighting knowledge, but there was a British military force already in place in Egypt.

During the momentous year of 1940, German military ambitions were fully occupied in Hitler's bold European campaigns. The invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, the latter involving weak and fragmented opposition by a Franco-British expeditionary force, was quickly followed by the swift and well-planned invasion of France and Flanders, starting on 10 May, which conquered Luxembourg, Holland and Belgium in short order and swept the British Expeditionary Force out of Northern France via Dunkirk all within three weeks. The French, demoralised and outfought, sued for peace on 17 June, and on 21 June were forced into a humiliating armistice. This did, however, leave more than a third of the southern part of the country unoccupied, run by a puppet government based at Vichy under the veteran World War 1 hero Marshal Pétain.



During the German campaign in France and Flanders, one of the German divisional commanders, whose fast-moving 7th Panzer Division gave distinguished and effective service, was Generalmajor Erwin Rommel, and his skill as an armoured force commander impressed Hitler. By now Hitler was master of most of Europe with only Great Britain standing in his way. So the summer and early autumn of 1940 was taken up largely with the attempt of the Luftwaffe to gain air superiority over British skies—in what became known as the Battle of Britain—while the German army and navy made preparations for a projected, but much delayed seaborne assault on southeast England, Operation 'Sealion' (*See Löwe*).

Against all this activity in Europe, the Mediterranean and Middle East were of much less significance to the German High Command in the spring and early summer of 1940. Hitler's Italian ally, Benito Mussolini, already had colonial interests in Africa including the major colony of Cyrenaica (Libya) to the west of Egypt. At the time of his conquest of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1936, Mussolini had actually been a more feared dictator than Adolf Hitler. However, for most of the time after that Mussolini postured and boasted but did little that was effective. In April 1939 he annexed neighbouring Albania in a 24-hour campaign, soon after Hitler had taken over the whole of Czechoslovakia and annexed Memel from Lithuania.

Even after Britain and France declared war on Germany in September 1939, Mussolini held back until he saw the way fortunes were going. On 10 June 1940, however, with France about to fall, he declared war on Britain and France, and just before the French armistice he sent a military invasion force into Southern France, via the Alpine front and centring on Mentone as an objective.

North Africa first entered German High Command thoughts on 24 July 1940, a few days after the decision to invade Great Britain was taken. The staff considered

Above: Panzer III tanks of 7th Panzer Division waiting to move forward during the advance in France, May 1940. Rommel, later the Afrika Corps commander, obtained his first major experience of handling tank forces at this time as commander of 7th Panzer Division.

possible options in case Operation 'Sealion' was postponed or abandoned, and one idea was to back up the Italian Army in Libya with German armoured forces in case it undertook operations against the British in Egypt. The German Army C-in-C, Generalfeldmarschall Walter von Brauchitsch, put this up to Hitler who liked the idea. 3rd Panzer Division, therefore, fresh from its triumphs in the French campaign, was told to prepare for service in North Africa. Meanwhile the Chief of Mobile Forces, General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma, was sent to Libya to sound out the Italian C-in-C, Marshal Graziani, on this prospect of German assistance. He got a lukewarm reception, however, and Graziani showed no enthusiasm at all, confident of the strength of his own forces.

This was emphasised further when Hitler and Mussolini had their famous 'summit' meeting at the Brenner Pass on 4 October. Hitler brought up again the prospect of German assistance in North Africa, and Mussolini flippantly replied that he would need no assistance until his North African army had pushed the British back to Mersa Matruh, at which time some German tanks and Stuka dive-bombers might come in useful.

Von Thoma's own assessment of the situation was produced about that time. He concluded that any operations in North Africa would best be carried out by German troops alone and thought four panzer divisions would be necessary, not withstanding the difficulty of transporting them and supplying them across the Mediterranean and having to run the gauntlet of the British Royal Navy to do so. This proposal was politically and logistically impossible at the time (not least because four panzer divisions could not be spared). When Mussolini carried out his sudden invasion of Greece on 28 October 1940 without consulting or forewarning Germany, Hitler was sufficiently disillusioned to order the postponement of any German plans for involvement in North Africa. As a result 3rd Panzer Division was diverted to another project, Operation 'Felix', the plan—never realised, of course—to attack Gibraltar.

Less than two months later, however, all this had changed. The war in the Western Desert had actually started in a modest way in June 1940, soon after Italy had declared war on Great Britain. At that time Egypt was being guarded by quite

Below: The success of Rommel and his fellow armoured division generals in sweeping away the British and French forces in his path led to the debacle of Dunkirk and a severe weakening of British fighting strength and equipment in 1940. Here British troops come back from France in May 1940.



a small British force, but British troops took part in active reconnaissance patrols along the Libya-Egypt border. In mid-September 1940 the Tenth Italian Army moved ponderously 60 miles into Egypt under the command of Marshal Graziani. British strength in Egypt had expanded meanwhile from the original 7th Armoured Division by the addition of three Commonwealth divisions, forming what was called the Western Desert Force under command of Lt-Gen R. N. O'Connor. On 9 December 1940, O'Connor started a well-planned and brilliantly conducted offensive against the numerically superior Italian Army and this resulted in a sweeping conquest of Cyrenaica, including the taking of the important towns of Bardia, Tobruk and Benghazi. The Italian Army was virtually eliminated by the first week in February with the capture of 130,000 men and a big haul of equipment.

While this campaign was at its height, Hitler became alarmed at the political consequences of this defeat and realised that German reinforcements would be needed. Not least of his worries was that the British conquest of the whole of North Africa, plus command of the seas in the Mediterranean, would be a strategic disaster for Germany. Therefore, on 11 January 1941 Hitler signed his Military Directive No 22 ordering the Army Command to raise a 'special blocking force' (*Sperrverband*) for dispatch to Tripoli, while the Luftwaffe Command was ordered to transfer *Fliegerkorps X* to Sicily for operations against British shipping and bases in the Mediterranean. Hitler met Mussolini on 19 January to discuss this. Mussolini accepted the idea of the blocking force, but on 22 January the important base of Tobruk fell to the British who now looked set fair to take the whole of Cyrenaica. It now seemed likely that a modest blocking force would be insufficient on its own and a force with offensive capability would be needed instead. Hitler may have been influenced in this by a comment made by the Army Chief of General Staff, General Franz Halder, in October 1940 that a single German division could probably push the British back to the Nile if Germany did have to get involved in North Africa. (As it happened this prediction had a bigger element of truth in it than anyone thought at the time.)

The Army General Staff acted quickly. The move to Tripoli was designated Operation 'Sunflower' (*Sonnenblume*) in orders issued on 10 February 1941, and the commander of German military forces in North Africa was to be Generalleutnant Erwin Rommel who had been picked and appointed personally by Hitler on 6 February. From his exploits as a panzer division commander in both the Polish and French campaigns, Hitler considered Rommel to be the best man for a post which would demand considerable on the spot decision-making a long way from home.

Despite the powerful size and strength of the German Army early in 1941, the forces allocated the Rommel's command were relatively scanty and weak. The main reason for this was that North Africa was still considered something of a sideshow despite the massive defeat of the Italian forces and, more importantly, the invasion of Russia scheduled for early summer 1941 was already in its advanced planning stages and took priority of allocation over all other considerations.

Nonetheless, advance members of staff for the special blocking force were appointed by 31 January and sent to Naples to await early passage to Tripoli. On 12 February, Rommel and his chief adjutant Rudolf Schmundt, plus other key staff members, reached Tripoli to set up their HQ. On 19 February the German expeditionary force to North Africa was given the name that was to become famous, *Deutsches Afrika Korps*, and the order stipulated that all German forces were to remain at all times under control of their commander and not to be put under Italian command except for periods of tactical co-operation when necessary.



Above: Rommel, in characteristic pose, directs troop movements from his staff car early in the Cyrenaica campaign. A staff officer with map case stands alongside. This photo dates from soon after the capture of Mechili.

READY FOR WAR

Regiment, 2nd Light Infantry Division of 3rd Panzer Division (see map) was the only unit capable of operating in the desert. It was the only unit capable of operating in the desert.

It was the only unit capable of operating in the desert.

It was the only unit capable of operating in the desert.

It was the only unit capable of operating in the desert.

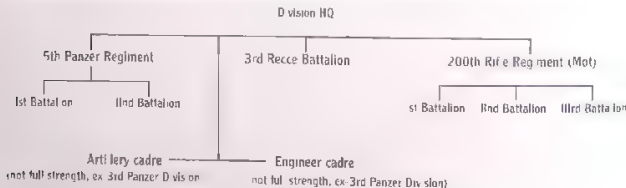
5th LIGHT DIVISION

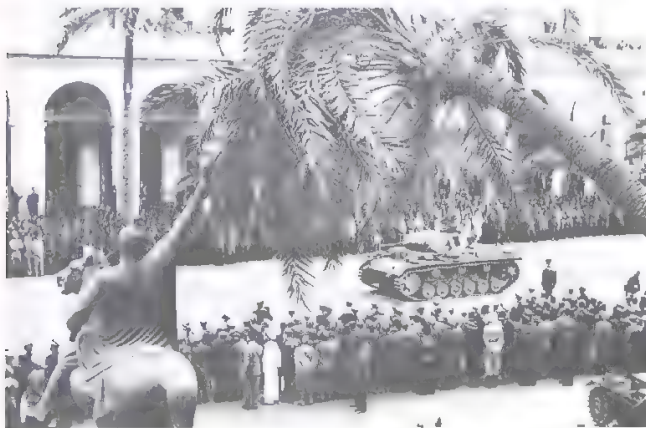
The division that was later to become 21st Panzer Division had a very modest birth indeed. As originally conceived the special backing force was seen as having an anti-tank and defence function. It was to be made up mainly from elements drawn from 3rd Panzer Division, which had been the format originally earmarked for North Africa back in the summer of 1940. There was no intention at this stage of sending a full-strength panzer division.

The first unit designated to move was 39th Panzer, later anti-tank Battalion from 3rd Panzer Division. This was a motorised unit with halftracks and trucks towing anti-tank guns (three companies each with nine Pak 36 37mm guns and two Pak 50mm guns). However, events already dictated that an armour, reconnaissance and infantry presence would be needed. 5th Panzer Regiment of 3rd Panzer Division was chosen as the armour element, having at the time an under-strength establishment of 20 PzKpfw IVs, 75 PzKpfw IIIs, 45 PzKpfw IIs and 25 PzKpfw I Ausf B tanks (including command and observation vehicles).

Also from 3rd Panzer Division came 3rd Reconnaissance (Aufklarung) Battalion with a light and heavy armoured car company, a motorcycle company and heavy weapons support platoons. Even this was under strength, for one of the light armoured car platoons had VW Kube wagens substituted. The infantry element was 200th Rifle (Schützen) Regiment from 3rd Panzer Division, and artillery support came from one battalion only of 75th Artillery Regiment, also from 3rd Panzer Division. Staff was drawn from the staff of 3rd Panzer Brigade within 3rd Panzer Division, the chief staff officer (1a)* being Major Hauser and the intelligence officer (1c) being Hauptmann von Kuge.

*German staff officer numbers—similar to our GSO (General Staff Officer) etc.—





To these ex-3rd Panzer Division units were added army troops from various depots and formations comprising 606th Flak Battalion (with 20mm guns), 605th Panzerjäger Battalion with three companies each of nine 4.7cm *Pak(t)(Sf) auf PzKpfw I Ausf B*—an ex-Czech 47mm anti-tank gun on a PzKpfw I Ausf B chassis (see photo page 16)—plus the 2nd and 8th Machine Gun Battalions.

This scratch formation was officially named 5th Light Division (Motorised) on 18 February 1941 and its divisional commander, effective from that date was Generalmajor Johannes Streich, who had been awarded the Knight's Cross for distinguished service while commanding 15th Panzer Regiment within 5th Panzer Division (as an *Oberst*—colonel) during the 1940 French campaign. By this date the first elements of the division were already in Tripoli, arriving in the February period though the last of the tanks did not finally arrive until 11 March, by which time the division had already seen action.

UNIT STRENGTHS

Light divisions were established by the Wehrmacht in 1938 and were essentially reduced-scale tank divisions. The full establishment was one tank (Panzer) battalion, with four motor rifle battalions (originally called *Kavallerie Schützen* to reflect the light nature of the division) and recon, engineer and artillery battalions. However 5th Light Division when formed departed from this establishment by having a tank regiment of two battalions, only three motor rifle battalions and other units initially in only cadre strength. The bulk of the units allocated to 5th Light Division were taken from 3rd Panzer Division which had taken part in the campaign in France and Flanders in 1940. The tank regiment was 5th Panzer Regiment and the reconnaissance battalion that played an important part in early operations was 3rd Recon Battalion.

The ad hoc nature of 5th Light Division was such that it never had a full establishment of tanks as laid down on paper. The two panzer battalions in theory would have had between them 105 PzKpfw I and IV medium tanks and 51 PzKpfw I and II light tanks. In the 5th Panzer Regiment there were only 130 tanks of all types of which two-thirds were gun tanks, the rest being unarmed observation or command tanks.

Below: A US Scout *Leichte Feldhaubitze* 18 of the 1st Cavalry 75th Artillery Regiment ready to fire in one of the early engagements of the Cyrenaica campaign, possibly at Agied.



By September 1941 the 5th Light Division had been brought up to Panzer division strength, insofar as supplies would allow and was then redesignated 21st Panzer Division. While there were theoretical establishments and down on the size equipment and manning of all German units including armoured divisions, the exigencies of war meant that there were many understrength units or ad hoc units made up from whatever equipment and men were available. This was true of the war in the Western Desert as it was later in Northwest Europe. The following tables however taken from US Intelligence Reports give the theoretical full strength allocations though they were rarely achieved.

1. Composition, armament and manpower of a tank regiment in the early part of World War II.

Units	Men	MCs	Other Vehs	PzII	PzIII	PzIV	MG	20mm	50mm	75mm
Two Bns of three Coys	1,700	120	255	21	77	28	263	21	71	28
Two Bns of four Coys	2,011	134	284	21	111	28	331	21	105	28
Three Bns of three Coys	2,416	170	353	28	114	30	400	28	106	30

2. Composition, armament and manpower of a tank regiment in the later part of the war (1943-44)

Units	Men	MCs	Other Vehs	PzII	PzIII	PzIV	MG	20mm	50mm	75mm
RtQ (inc Sig Pl, Lt Tk Pl and repair platoon)	128	10	15	7	3	0	13	7	1	0
Three Bn HQs	63	9	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Bn HQ Coys	666	78	135	21	9	0	87	21	3	0
Three Battalions	1,251	63	108	0	102	30	288	0	102	30
Supply column	56	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Workshop Coy	252	6	62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2,416	170	353	28	114	30	388	28	106	30

3. Composition of a tank battalion in a Panzer Division

Units	Men	MCs	Other Vehs	PzII	PzIII	PzIV	MG	20mm	50mm	75mm
Bn HQs	21	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bn HQ Coy (inc Sig Pl, Lt Tk Pl, MC Pl, AA Pl and repair platoon)	222	26	45	7	3	0	40	7	1	0
Two light Coys	288	14	24	0	34	0	68	0	34	0
One medium Coy	129	7	12	0	0	14	28	0	0	14
Total	660	50	86	7	37	14	136	7	35	14

4. Composition of a tank battalion in a light division (theoretical)

Units	Men	MCs	Other Vehs	PzII	PzIII	PzIV	MG	20mm	50mm	75mm
Battalion HQ	232	29	50	7	3	0	99	7	3	0
Two light Coys	288	14	24	0	34	0	0	0	34	0
One medium Coy	129	7	12	0	0	10	0	0	0	10
Total	649	50	86	7	37	10	99	7	37	10

5. Composition, armament, and manpower of an anti-tank battalion in a Panzer division.

Units	Men	MCs	Other	MG	20mm ATk	50mm ATk
Battalion HQ	76	5	23	0	0	0
Two Coys (each 9 x 50mm ATk guns)	276	22	52	6	0	18
One Coy (20mm AA/ATk guns on SP mounts)	200	17	18	4	12	0
Total	552	44	93	10	12	18





1. The Panzer Division was the only German unit to be equipped with the new Panzerfaust 88 anti-tank weapon.

2. The Panzer Division was the only German unit to be equipped with the new Panzerfaust 88 anti-tank weapon.

3. The Panzer Division was the only German unit to be equipped with the new Panzerfaust 88 anti-tank weapon.

4. The Panzer Division was the only German unit to be equipped with the new Panzerfaust 88 anti-tank weapon.

5. The Panzer Division was the only German unit to be equipped with the new Panzerfaust 88 anti-tank weapon.

6 Organisation, equipment, and manpower of a full-strength Panzer Division, 1943

Units	Men	Mtrel	Other	Lt AC	Hy AC	PzII	PzIII	PzIV
Division HQ	185	39	31	0	0	0	0	0
Panzer Regiment	2,416	170	353	0	0	28	114	30
Motorcycle Battalion	1,153	236	150	18	6	0	0	0
Motorised Infantry Brigade	4,409	314	713	0	0	0	0	0
Panzer Artillery Regiment	2,102	132	455	0	0	0	0	0
Panzer Engineer Battalion	979	101	220	0	0	2	0	0
Panzerjäger Battalion	552	44	93	0	0	0	0	0
Panzer Signal Battalion	420	27	85	0	0	0	0	0
Services	2,157	120	446	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	14,373	1,183	2,546	18	6	30	114	30

Weapons	Panzer Regt	MC Bn	Mot Inf Brig	Panzer Arty Regt	Panzer Engr Bn	ATk Bn	Panzer Sig Bn	TOTAL
Machine pistols	0	0	156	0	0	0	0	156
Machine guns, light	376	87	358	24	48	16	22	931
Machine guns, heavy	24	12	48	0	0	0	0	84
ATk rifles	0	9	36	0	0	0	0	45
20mm AA/ATk guns	28	18	0	0	2	12	0	60
37mm ATk guns	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	18
50mm tank guns	106	0	0	0	0	0	0	106
50mm ATk guns	0	3	18	0	0	18	0	39
81mm mortars	0	6	24	0	0	0	0	30
75mm inf howitzers	30	2	16	0	0	0	0	48
150mm inf howitzers	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	8
105mm gun-howitzers	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
105mm guns	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
150mm gun-howitzers	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	8

5th LIGHT DIVISION as at early February 1941

Division HQ

Divisional Staff, 3 Sigs (Mot) Sig Bn, 1 (mot) Med Coy
200th (mot) Mapping Pl, 200th Printing Det

5th Panzer Regiment

RHQ

Panzer Battalion I

- Bn HQ and Staff Coy 3 tanks
- 1 x Lt Pl 5 tanks
- 2 x Lt Coy 22 tanks
- 1 x Med Coy 20 tanks
- 1 x Lt Supply Column

Panzer Battalion II

- Bn HQ and Staff Coy 3 tanks
- 1 x Lt Pl 5 tanks
- 2 x Lt Coy 22 tanks
- 1 x Med Coy 20 tanks
- 1 x Lt Supply Column

2 x Light Panzer Platoons

- 1 x Armed Sig Pl
- 1 x Regimental Band
- 1 x (mot) Reserve Det
- 1 x (mot) Armed Main Coy

39th (mot) Panzerjäger Battalion

- 1 x (mot) Staff Sect
- 3 x (mot) Panzerjäger Coys

I/75th Artillery Regiment

Bn HQ

- 1 x (mot) Sig Det
- 1 x (mot) Calibration Det
- 3 x (mot) Batteries

200th Rifle (Schützen) Regiment

RHQ

- 1 x (mot) Sig Pl

2nd (mot) MG Battalion

- Bn HQ, 1 x (mot) Sig Pl
- 1 x MC Coy
- 3 x (mot) MG Coys
- 2 x (mot) Pioneer Coys
- 1 x (mot) Heavy Coy
- HQ
- 1 x A/Tk Pl
- 1 x Mor Sect

8th (mot) MG Battalion

- Bn HQ, 1 x (mot) Sig Pl
- 1 x MC Coy
- 3 x (mot) MG Coys
- 2 x (mot) Support Coy
- 1 x A/Tk Coy
- 1 x (mot) Pioneer Coy
- 1 x Mor Sect

3rd Recce Battalion

- Bn HQ
- 1 x Lt AC Coy
- 1 x MC Coy
- 1 x (mot) Lt Supply Column
- 1 x Inf Support Gun Sect
- 1 x Heavy Coy
- 1 x Pioneer Pl
- 1 x Panzerjäger Pl

Support Troops

- Staff/683rd (mot) Loading Special Employment Bn
- Staff/681st (mot) Unloading Special Employment Bn

- 688th (mot) Supply Commander zhV

- 1 (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 641st (mot) Hy Water Col

- 1 (mot) Pz Replacement Col

- 588th (mot) Munition Col

- 129th (mot) Motor Vehicle Repair Coy

- 122nd (mot) Motor Vehicle Repair Coy

- 1 (mot) Supply Bn (3 x Coys)

- 619th (mot) Supply Bn

- 797th (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 800th (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 801st (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 803rd (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 804th (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 822nd (mot) Lt Supply Col

- 5/619th (mot) Hy Supply Col

- 6/619th (mot) Hy Supply Col

- 622nd (mot) Hy Supply Col

- 533rd (mot) Supply Bn

- 6 x (mot) Hy Supply Cols

- 1 x (mot) Hy Fle Co

- 1 (mot) Maint Pl

- 735th (mot) Field Post Office

- 309th (mot) MP Pl

- 631st (mot) Ambulance Coy

- 633rd (mot) Ambulance Coy

- 4/572nd (mot) Field Hospital

- 1/83rd (mot) Medical Coy

- 877th (mot) Medical Supply Coy

- 645th (mot) Water Col

- 503rd (mot) Butcher Sect

- 531st (mot) Bakery Sect

- 341st (mot) Admin Sect

I/33rd Flak Regiment

Bn Staff Sect

- 1 x Sig Sect
- 2 x Lt Horse-drawn Sup Co
- 3 x (mot) Hy Batteries
- 2 x (mot) Lt Batteries

606th SP Flak Battalion

- 1 x SP Staff Sect
- 3 x SP Flak Coys

Luftwaffe

- 2 (H)/14 Pz Recce Staffel

605th Panzerjäger Battalion

- 1 x Armed Staff Sect

- 1 x (mot) Sig Det

- 3 x SP Panzerjäger Coys

Official tank strength
at February 1941

PzKpfw I	25
PzKpfw II	45
PzKpfw III	75
PzKpfw IV	20
Total	165

the Gulf of Sirte and Tripoli and eliminating all Italian forces from North Africa. But fortune changed all this. With stretched lines of communication and the need to resupply and repair damaged equipment, O'Connor was ordered by General Sir Archibald Wavell the British C-in-C to rest and replenish for two weeks. Thus it was not until 4 February that the advance was resumed, with Benghazi and Beda Fomm taken after spirited fighting on 7 February and El Agheila secured on 8 February. General O'Connor now planned his final push, scheduled to start on 12 February. His 7th Armoured Division would move along the coast road to take Sirte and then head towards Tripoli, co-ordinating with the possible landing of a British Infantry brigade from the sea at Tripoli itself on 20 February, so clearing Tripolitania of the enemy. It would not have been too formidable a task—save for the lengthened supply lines—for the remaining Italian forces were demoralised, disorganised and poorly equipped.

However at the end of January 1941 the British government was asked by the Greek government for urgent assistance against the threat of a German invasion. As a result Prime Minister Churchill asked the Middle East C-in-C to transfer the bulk of the Western Desert Force (by now renamed XI Corps) to Greece while further operations in Libya were suspended. Despite pleas to be allowed to take Tripoli, Churchill was insistent and on 13 February, the day after Rommel arrived at Tripoli, the Libyan campaign was officially halted. XI Corps was withdrawn and dispersed. A week later Cyrenaica Command was set up at little more than brigade strength as an army of occupation.

This mistake was further compounded by compacency. The British Ultra decrypting organisation was reading German signals traffic from the moment Rommel arrived in Tripoli. A key order came from General Halder at OKH telling him not to contemplate any offensive action until May after 15th Panzer Division had arrived in Tripolitania. The British like OKH, believed this would be the case (so giving the light British forces in Cyrenaica time to train and organise defences) but nobody reckoned with Rommel's own military instincts.

Rommel was surprised by the turn of events by the time he arrived in Tripoli. In his diary he wrote: 'On 8 February leading troops of the British Army occupied El Agheila. Graziani's army had virtually ceased to exist. All that remained of it were a few straggling columns and hordes of unarmed soldiers in full flight to the west. If Wavell had now continued his advance into Tripolitania no resistance worthy of the name could be mounted against him.'

There was no time for 5th Light to relax and all arrangements, including provision of tropical clothing and briefing the troops about conditions in North Africa, were done literally at the last minute—on the ships crossing to Tripoli. The hastily produced supply of reed-green cotton uniforms—breeches, shirt and tunic—and cork sun helmets were worn for the first time after the men landed. For publicity purposes, Rommel had the first arrivals (13rd Reconnaissance Battalion) parade in front of the Governor's Palace in Tripoli as soon as they were landed. Because there were so few of them, Rommel had each platoon go around the corner and tag on again at the back, four times, so that for newsreel cameras and photographers the force appeared much bigger than it actually was. As the tanks were not due to arrive for some time, he engaged all the local carpenters to make 200 dummy wooden tanks and placed them on commandeered car chassis so that any photo-recce operations by the British would assume that a massive armoured force was already present. In fact, it would be another month before 5th Light's tank component (5th Panzer Regiment) would be in place and officially Rommel would conserve his forces until then. However the expected British advance into Tripolitania did not happen, so Rommel decided to test out the opposition without

Highly polished Axis and 5th Panzer uniforms as
shown above from a transport on arrival at Tripoli.
Left: grey tunics on camouflage trousers.



waiting. Together with his chief adjutant, Rudolf Schmudt, he made several flights along the coast towards Sirte and saw disorganised retreating Italian units but no sign of the British. He sent Schmudt straight back to Germany to report personally to Hitler on 19 February asking for more anti-tank guns, mines and air support. The latter request was met personally by Goering, who arranged for a composite squadron of Heinkel He111 bombers, Junkers Ju52 transports and six Fieseler Fi156 Storch spotter planes to be sent at once.

Meanwhile Rommel sent the armoured cars of 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion along the coast road to Sirte and beyond to probe the enemy. If the enemy was there. It was on 20 February, within a week of landing in Tripoli, that first contact was made, on the Tripolitania-Cyrenaica border. A troop of three Marmon-Harrington armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards patrolling the border near El Agheila, spotted on an opposite flank a big eight-wheeled armoured car of a type they'd never seen before. Reaching the coast road at 15.00hrs they encountered near the border fort a platoon of three of the eight-wheeled armoured cars—Sd Kfz 232s—together with an armed truck and a motorcycle combination. Fire was exchanged and the British cars tried to outflank the German vehicles but got stuck in the sand. By the time they got out the Germans had gone. As dusk fell they moved back along the coast road and saw another armoured car near the border fort blocking the road. They presumed this to be British, but as they drew close they saw it was another Sd Kfz 232. There was an exchange of fire as the cars

raced away. On 24 February there was another clash when the same British armoured car troop again approached the border fort and was ambushed by another platoon of 3rd Recce Battalion who were hidden in wait. In the close range exchange of fire one of the Marmon-Harrington cars was knocked out and its crew taken prisoner while the driver of another car was killed—first blood to 5th Light. The British troop commander in both these engagements was Lt E. T. Williams who later (as a Brigadier) was famous as General Montgomery's chief intelligence officer. German propaganda made great play of what they called the Battle of Fort El Agheila, but this also prompted the British to take offensive action. They started to set up an ambush alongside the fort with 25pdr and 2pdr anti-tank guns, heavy infantry weapons and a minefield in the road, but they were spotted by the Germans. They called in an air strike that knocked several British vehicles and caused major casualties before the mission was aborted. No German ground forces were seen.

At dawn on 2 March, 5th Light struck back with an ambush on the coast road. They now had the first '88' to arrive in North Africa and this was well sited to pick off approaching British vehicles. The leading Marmon-Harrington armoured car was attacked, cut off and blocked by two 3rd Recce eight-wheel armoured cars, and its crew captured. They were surprised to find themselves being interviewed shortly afterwards by Generalmajor Streich, the divisional commander, who was personally directing this operation and had occupied the border fort.

Meanwhile Rommel had ordered the rest of 5th Light to mop up the coast road of the Gulf of Sirte towards the Cyrenaica border. By mid-March 8,000 men of the division had landed as had all tanks of 5th Panzer Regiment. British patrols on 28 March saw

Below: Some of the chaos the collapse of a bridge after a tank was blown into the air. As seen from the air, no other tanks were visible in the area. The wheeled transport however is still in the ground.



first German tanks approaching the border and one of them ran over one of the British mines killing two crewmen—the first casualties in 5th Light. By now the Italian Ariete Division, a fresh armoured formation, had been put under Rommel's command and events were about to speed up.

There was still wariness on both sides in early March 1941. British intelligence now thought a limited German advance was likely in early April. Information gleaned by Ultra from German signal traffic The King's Dragoon Guards, who held the Cyrenaica frontier area, were told to make a fighting withdrawal if that happened. At the same time, Rommel was still worried that the British would resume their offensive and push into Tripolitania. He sent a report to OKH on 9 March stating that he preferred to attack the British sooner rather than later to avoid the really hot weather of June, though he was still prepared to await the arrival of 15th Panzer Division before he made a move. At this stage he only contemplated attempting to take Cyrenaica not east because of problems of supply and lines of communications. OKH thinking at that time was that moving beyond Cyrenaica into Egypt would best be put off until autumn 1941 when the hoped-for conquest of Russia should be completed, thus freeing many more troops and tanks for North Africa. On 20 March Rommel flew back to Berlin to report on progress. The Army C-in-C, von Brauchitsch, took a typically cautious view suggesting that with 15th Panzer in place, DAK could strike out for Agedabia using that as a base for any further advances. At that stage OKH was sure that there must still be powerful British armoured divisions in place in Cyrenaica.

The fighting patrols of late February and March, which had led to only a limited British response, convinced Rommel that a modest offensive advance was possible, certainly now that 5th Light Division had the tanks of 5th Panzer Regiment. He ordered Generalmajor Streich to mount a set-piece attack by 5th Light on 31 March to take the Mersa Brega gap, which was the key to the coastal route into Cyrenaica.

The British forces available to guard Mersa Brega amounted to little more than the newly arrived 2nd Armoured Division, which had just replaced the experienced 7th Armoured Division. 2nd Armoured was under strength, not fully trained or acclimatised, short of transport and armed with a motley mix of older cruiser tanks, light tanks and captured M13 Italian tanks, not all of them properly equipped. Nonetheless, when 5th Light launched its attack, the attackers had a hard time of it. A regiment of 25pdrs held off two attacks by 5th Panzer Regiment tanks, damaging several and forcing others off the road into the sand where they got stuck. Even Streich's command post was almost made untenable by accurate 25pdr fire. Streich called in Stukas to try to dislodge the effective British batteries but the British gunners held fast. Streich realised that if the British put in a counter attack with tanks at that moment, 5th Light would have to withdraw.

Fortunately, nothing like that happened and at dusk Streich had the idea of sending 8th Machine Gun Battalion up the coast through the sand dunes beyond the coastal road to get behind and attack the British right flank. This unexpected surprise assault at night caused mayhem in the British rear and the British commander quickly pulled out. Streich was surprised and delighted at this successful outcome and without reference to his corps commander he sent his tanks, 3rd Recce Battalion, the two machine gun battalions and his only artillery, 12 guns—in close pursuit. He gleefully told Major Hauser, his 1a (see page 10), that they were going to Agedabia, and they moved so fast the next day that some of the German tanks caught up, cut off and ran amok among the British rear units who were still withdrawing to Agedabia. Three German tanks were lost at this



Stukas 'bombed' the British command post at Mersa Brega on 31 March 1941. The British command post was almost made untenable by accurate 25pdr fire.

Official tank strength at end March 1941

PzKpfw I	25
PzKpfw II	45
PzKpfw III	71
PzKpfw IV	20
Total	161

action and two broke down but a numerically small number of German tanks, only 12 at the finish, caused much damage and chaos. An immediate lesson learned was that the 2pdr guns on the British cruiser tanks could not penetrate a German PzKpfw II at 1 000m (c3,000ft) but at the same range the 50mm gun of the German tank could penetrate the thickest front armour of a British cruiser tank. This valuable lesson was put to good use in the weeks and months ahead.

The British now abandoned Agadabia, leaving it in Streich's hands, and withdrew fast in the direction of Antelat (inland) and Beda Fomm along the coast. Though Rommel is generally credited with this swift advance that set the German offensive moving, he only found out about it after it happened. It was Streich's initiative as a divisional commander (and drawing on his experience as a tank regiment commander in France in 1940) that got the advance started, though it was approved by Rommel in retrospect when he saw the opportunity that the move provided. Air reconnaissance now showed British units moving east generally. So on 3 April, the day after the capture of Agadabia, Rommel decided that the British had no determination to stand and fight. He realised now that he had the chance to keep the momentum going and take the whole of Cyrenaica in one bold operation.

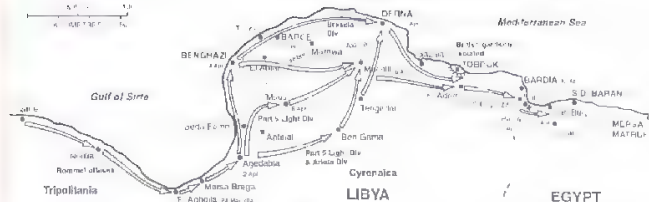
British misfortunes were compounded by several further command decisions. General O'Connor had been succeeded by Lt Gen Philip Neame VC, an officer of great reputation but with no previous experience of the desert. The battle-hardened 7th Armoured Division had been withdrawn to Egypt and replaced by the newly formed 2nd Armoured Division, which together with its commander, Maj Gen M. D. Gamber Parry was fresh from England. Because of the complacent assumption that no big German offensive would begin before May, the British (in Cyrenaica) had given written orders to Neame that in the event of any German light probing, his forces were to withdraw and yield the ground. Neame obeyed this order quite literally and ordered his forces to pull back when the first German forces appeared on 31 March, but the speed and zeal of Rommel's advance meant that what in normal circumstances might have been an orderly withdrawal, soon became a chaotic rout.

Rommel had organised his relatively meagre forces to cover every possible route into Cyrenaica. The armoured cars of 5th Light's hard-worked 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion were sent racing up the coast road towards Benghazi, which they reached that same evening of 3 April. To their surprise they found it abandoned with the military stores burning and the two brigades of Australian infantry who were based there already departed following orders, and joining the general retreat eastwards.

In a typically unorthodox move, Rommel contacted Generalmajor Heinrich Kirchheim, a staff officer from OKH on a fact-finding tour of Libya, and put him in charge of some assorted units of the Italian Brescia Division to follow up the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion and carry on round the coast road to Derna. Meanwhile, Generalmajor Streich took

below it, and the British command while still in a defensive campaign mark up positions on the beach at El Agheila during the opening stages of the advance to Cremona. Note the camouflage from local beach huts and the top of the beach huts.





Rommel's fast offensives were surprising his own side as well as the British. His divisional commander Stiech and the individual regimental and unit commanders were urged on often against their better judgement and usually by Rommel dropping literally from the sky to tell them for he was using his Storch aircraft.

incessantly over the battlefield. If he didn't actually land alongside a unit he flew low over it and dropped a hand-written message. Even Hitler was upstaged. On 3 April he sent a telegram to Rommel reminding him not to launch any large-scale offensive until the 15th Panzer Division was in place, and not to expose its tank by advancing to Benghazi. But by the time this telegram was received Benghazi had already been occupied by 3rd Recce Battalion and the three-pronged offensive was already under way across the Cyrenaica 'Bulge'. When the Italian General Gariboldi, nominally the area commander and senior to Rommel, questioned the wisdom of what he was doing, Rommel simply told him the opportunity was too good to miss!

British fortunes were aggravated by poor and confused communications (or sometimes none at all), the ever-troubling shortage of fuel which caused some tanks to be abandoned and faulty intelligence or misinterpretation of events. A major mistake occurred on 3 April when a large enemy column was reported to be heading for Msus, a major fuel dump. The fuel was destroyed and the post abandoned, but the 'enemy force' was then discovered to be a returning patrol of the Long Range Desert Group. On the same day 5th Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) were ordered to engage approaching 'enemy tanks' near Anteaf but these turned out to be 6RTR withdrawing to the same position.

On 6 April 5th Panzer Regiment and units under command took Msus, with its romantic 'Beau Geste' fort already abandoned by the British and headed on to Mechil. Between Msus and Mechil, however, the going got rough. Fuel was running out and the stony ground to the south of the Gebe Akhbar played havoc with the tank tracks, so only a few tanks, trucks and halftracks made it on to Mechil. Streich's main party suffered similarly, largely due to shortage of fuel for the tanks. By the time it reached Mechil, Streich had left his tank detachment behind because of breakdowns or lack of fuel, and the heaviest equipment he took with him were a few of the trucks armed with 20mm flak guns. Von Schwerin's 3rd Recce and units under command, coming across from Benghazi, were similarly afflicted. One good reason for all this, of course, is that all the vehicles from track to tanks had been designed for European conditions and not for the extremes of

Below: The British surroundings at Msus with 'Beau Geste' fort. Both 'Beau Geste' side forts were still captured by the 15th Panzer Division on 11 April. The 15th Panzer Division was still with all its own tanks and trucks, and it was still flag-shelter in the fort in the background.





Rommel, buzzing over the area in his Storch, was frustrated by the delays. He had noted British forces gathering around Mechil and was keen to get among them. He landed alongside Streich on the late afternoon of April 6 to urge the division on, and was very displeased at the excuses for the delays. He flew off to find the stragglers and the next day the surviving runners of Streich's tank detachment, a PzKpfw IV and seven PzKpfw IIs, caught up, as did an artillery battery of the Italian Ariete Division which Rommel had rounded up. Von Schwerin's 3rd Recce Battalion finally caught up too, on 7 April, and by that evening a somewhat reduced 5th Light Division had finally drawn up on the low hills looking down on the fort at Mechil. Rommel was in better mood. In the gathering dusk he landed his Storch alongside Streich's command car and shouted, 'Tomorrow we attack.'

What had undoubtedly lifted Rommel's spirits was an unexpected coup on the night of 6/7 April. Because of the disarray among the British forces, Wavell had sent General O'Connor up from Egypt where he had been on leave to advise General Neame. They met at Marua, a British base in the Gebel Akkhar, to confer with Major General Leslie Morshead, commander of 9th Australian Infantry Division, whose brigades had been stretched between Benghazi and Tobruk. Spirited resistance by an Australian infantry battalion had held up the 3rd Recce Battalion for a day east of Benghazi. O'Connor suggested a defence line be set up between Mechili and Gazala, and Morshead set off east in his staff car past Derna and on to Gazala. Neame and O'Connor followed a short time later in another staff car, but in the dark the driver took a wrong turning and ran into the leading troops of Ponath's 8th Machine Gun Battalion who had just arrived on the outskirts of Derna. The Germans were surprised to find they had captured the two senior British generals in Cyrenaica, and they went on to capture quite a few more British troops that night including a complete mobile field hospital and the commander and some staff officers of 3rd Armoured Brigade.

Seeking to take Derna afield, 8th Machine Gun Battalion were counter-attacked first by the armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards who were

withdrawing east, then on the afternoon of 7 April by the remnants of 5RTM whose few remaining A13 cruiser tanks were lost in the engagement, though not before knocking out several 8th Battalion vehicles.

By rights 8th Machine Gun Battalion was too weak and tired to achieve success at Derna but they were undoubtedly helped by the demoralisation and confusion of the British. This certainly helped the next day when Streich's much depleted main force put in its attack on Mechili. The base was actually held by 3rd Indian Motor Brigade but Maj-Gen Gambler Parry had also moved in his 2nd Armoured Division HQ and support units, and ordered the remnants of 3rd Armoured Brigade to join them. On the evening of 7 April, however, Gambler-Parry received orders to pull out of Mechili at dawn the next day and withdraw eastwards on Tobruk. At that time 2nd Armoured Division was down to its last tank—an A13 cruiser of divisional HQ.

As soon as the British started to move out things went wrong for them, for 5th Light was waiting to attack. A company of 3rd Indian Motor Brigade was first out but it ran into an artillery column of the Italian Ariete Division enplaced to the east. The Indians dispersed the Italians with a bayonet charge but they soon regrouped and destroyed the sole A13 tank as soon as it appeared, leading a British motorised column. The column moved on but right into the path of Streich's divisional HQ whose personnel, including Streich, engaged it with small arms fire and the truck-mounted 20mm cannon. While this was happening, Streich's small tank force attacked from the side. A lucky shot by a courageous 2pdr anti-tank gun crew knocked out the sole PzKpfw IV, hitting the tank's undersides as it climbed the anti-tank mound around the fort. The attacking force now comprised only the seven PzKpfw IIs and a few trucks carrying infantry but some of the trucks were fitted with rakes to raise extra dust and sand—not only to conceal them from enemy gunners but to make the force look much bigger than it actually was. Over all this dust and gunfire flew Rommel in his Storch. Gambler-Parry, viewing the apparent size of the attacking force and the confusion all around him, decided on surrender, though several groups—including one column of 60 vehicles—managed

to break out and make a run for it to Tobruk or Solum. Over 2,000 British and Indian troops were captured at Mechili though not before the British had set fire to the fuel dump. The smoke from this, however, acted as a beacon for the many small elements of 5th Light who were struggling to catch up broken down vehicles, tanks awaiting fuel, and the like.

Rommel's own mobility in his Storch caused problems for his staff. On 7 April it became clear from intelligence reports to Rommel's chief of staff, a operations officer at the Tactical HQ Agadabia that the ad hoc and disorganised assembly of British forces at Mechili offered no threat to his advance and could be bypassed for the more important objective of Tobruk. But they could not pass this appreciation

Below: Rommel and his staff in the Storch. The Storch's unusual aircraft, in addition to direct operations, were also used to deliver supplies to the front. Rommel's personal Storch was shot down after the capture of Mechili.





to their chief who was flying here, there and everywhere in his Storch completely out of touch with Tactical HQ. So they sent Rommel's ADC, Lt H. W. Schmidt in another Storch either to track down Rommel or failing that, to reach Generalmajor Stretch and pass the order straight to him. However Schmidt himself got lost (there were sandstorms about) and did not arrive at Stretch's divisional HQ until the early morning of 8 April, by which time the attack on Mechili was a ready under way. Commentators of the desert war have speculated that had Rommel not lost touch with his Tactical HQ and received the staff's advice the outcome of the Cyrenaica campaign might have been ever more successful culminating in the speedy capture of Tobruk, which in the event it did not happen.

On the positive side in spite of the burning of the fuel the taking of Mechili did yield a good supply of stores and rations and vehicles to boost Afrika Korps stocks. Included in the haul were two AEC armoured command trucks, one of which was appropriated by Rommel for his personal use and named *Mammut* (mammoth).

Presently Johannes Stretch requested two days for rest and maintenance before proceeding, but Rommel ordered him to press straight on to Tobruk no matter what the state of the men or equipment. Every man and vehicle had to move, may move. However a fierce sandstorm raged on 9 and 10 April and severely restricted movement and reconnaissance. This did not stop the Australian and British troops who were in Tobruk with General Morshead as garrison commander working non-stop to make good the defences on the perimeter. Morshead took a typically tough line promising a policy of no surrender no retreat to his unit commanders.

Major Edmund Morshead, the first of the British officers to be killed in the desert war, was killed in the attack on Mechili on 4 April 1941.

100 P. 111, 112, 113, 114

AN OBJECTIVE TOO FAR

For Rommel, Tobruk proved an objective too far. Morshead had around 25 000 troops under command, half of them Australian. 1RTR with 27 assorted cruiser and light tanks had arrived from Egypt just before Tobruk was besieged and various other tanks were found and repaired to make up another squadron. After a week, a squadron of 7RTR arrived by sea making up a unit of 14 Matilda tanks when those already at Tobruk were included. There were also the surviving KDC armoured cars. Artillery was better provided for with four field regiments with 72 25pdrs in all, and further batteries had 18pdr and 60pdr guns.

The town and seaport of Tobruk lay at the foot of a low natural escarpment emanating from the eastern foothills of the Gebel Akbar. The Italians had built an anti-tank ditch around the landward perimeter up on the escarpment, reinforced with barbed wire and minefields. Concrete emplacements had been built in a double row inside the perimeter with others sited at the heads of the many water worn inlets into the escarpment. Priority had been given to repairing the perimeter defences so that by April 11 the perimeter was reasonably complete and fully covered by infantry. The perimeter was a considerable 45km (30 miles) in length and the garrison troops were fully stretched guarding it. As there was only a limited number of anti-tank guns available—all 2pdrs of limited value—there was great dependency on the 25pdrs to hold off enemy tanks. The plan was to hold them well back, so that if any German armour broke through it could be engaged over open sights.

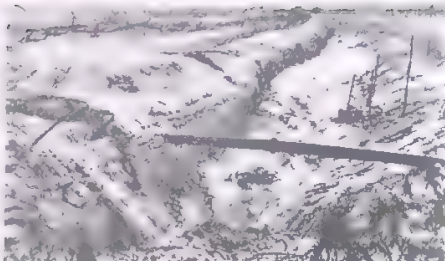
Rommel sent Ponath's 8th Machine Gun Battalion on along the coast road from Derna towards Tobruk, but for two days (9 and 10 April) they were forced to fight for every inch of the way against a determined Australian rearguard backed up by KDC's armoured cars. Rommel had the idea of shelling the Tobruk port area from the west if he could find a high enough gun position. He asked General von Kirchheim, who had been shepherding along the units from the Italian Brescia Division, to go forward to find a suitable position. While doing so, his car was strafed by an RAF fighter coming in over the coast and Kirchheim was wounded. As it happened the newly arrived commander of 15th Panzer Division Generalmajor Heinrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron, had arrived on the scene to see the battlefront while he awaited the arrival of his division. Rommel asked him to take Kirchheim's place. Von Prittwitz did so, but his car was completely destroyed when he was ambushed, just 6km (less than four miles) from Tobruk by a

Right: The coastline between Baida and Sidi Barrani at the time of the German advance in April 1941, as photographed from a German aircraft.



[illegible][illegible][illegible]

Right: Flak tank in the forward part of the perimeter defences - 8th Machine Gun Battalion - in the same area as the anti-tank ditch in the background



On the following day 12 April 5th Light's tanks tried again. Passing through the positions of 8th Machine Gun Battalion at 11 00hrs they reached the wire again without artillery support but could not cross the anti-tank ditch and therefore withdrew. On the following day Easter Sunday 13 April, Rommel carried out a seaf raid over Tobruk telling the British forces to surrender, '... so doing signalling with a white handkerchief will not be fired on. Strong German forces have surrounded Tobruk. There is no point in trying to escape. Remember Me! I! Our bombers and Stukas lie in wait for your ships in the harbour.'

This bluff got nowhere for by now it must have been obvious to Tobruk defenders that the Germans were thinly spread with hardly enough forces to patrol the 45km (30-mile) perimeter let alone attack it effectively. As so Rommel did know that there had been a change of policy and far from trying to escape defenders were there to stay.

Rommel now had an argument with Streich over the interpretation of aerial photos and intelligence reports. Rommel thought the forces in Tobruk were being evacuated by sea. Streich and his 1st, Major Hauser took the opposite view, thinking that the forces were being reinforced. As it happened they were correct. The small convoy of lighters and ships seen arriving were bringing Matilda 25pdr more stores and ammunition and more troops, they were not an evacuation fleet. In view of this, Streich thought that yet another attack on the perimeter at present strength would be ineffective and wasteful. Ponath commanding 8th Machine Gun Battalion was of the same opinion. His unit had already suffered many casualties and in their present position in front of the wire were still exposed to heavy artillery and small-arms fire from the Australian.

Rommel was enraged at what he called the pessimism of his commanders and decided to take personal charge of the attack planned for Friday, 14 April. He promised a 'concentrated artillery strike to back the attack which was to start at 18 00hrs in the dusk. However the artillery support was not to be just a few 88mm flak guns, certainly powerful and useful, but emplaced on the flat rocky ground behind 8th Machine Gun Battalion, fully exposed with no cover for the crews, consequently, casualties from the attack were so heavy that the guns were largely ineffective.

As darkness fell 8th Machine Gun Battalion under Ponath advanced and found a gap in the wire which they cleared of mines. Advancing further saw nobody, but the bridgehead was tenuous and there were a number of

attacks in the dark by small Australian raiding parties which caused 40 casualties. Nonetheless, Rommel thought the penetration of the perimeter now made a tank attack viable, so he handed operational control back to Streich but detailed his ADC, Lt Schmidt, to stay as a liaison officer with Streich and keep a 'watching brief' on operations.

The tank attack went gravely wrong, however. Streich decided to lead the assault from the top of a PzKpfw II, but as he approached the start line in the dark the tank and Streich's accompanying Kubelwagen came under artillery and small-arms fire from a British patrol. The Kubelwagen and its driver escaped, but the tank was disabled and Streich and Lt Schmidt had to escape on foot and rejoin the action late. The tank attack itself was a rout in a trap cleverly set up by General Morshead. The bridgehead corridor was under half a mile wide, and the 25pdrs were placed well back at the end of the corridor with Portee anti-tank guns (guns on the back of lorries to provide mobility) on each flank and IRTs on the eastern flank as well. As the German tanks advanced the defenders held fire. Once the Germans were well into the corridor, the British opened up with a withering barrage of 25pdr fire, followed by fire from the tanks. Under this battering the German 5th Panzer Regiment commander, Oberst Olrich, had no real option but to turn and withdraw, leaving behind 17 of the 36 tanks that had started. This withdrawal in turn left 8th Machine Gun Battalion exposed. Ponath's men, running out of ammunition, ordered a fighting withdrawal through the gap. As he led his men back he was killed. Later he was awarded a posthumous Knight's Cross for his brave leadership. The battalion by now had only five officers and 92 men left, having lost over 700 in the previous two weeks of action. With Ponath dead the survivors surrendered to the Australians and the unit was no more.

Rommel blamed both Streich and Olrich for this debacle and criticised them for not securing the flanks, but in truth they had insufficient infantry to have done this—only the much depleted 8th Machine Gun Battalion—and there was virtually no supporting artillery and too few tanks to sustain the assault. Rommel himself certainly lost some credibility over this unsuccessful attack (though seemingly not with Hitler), for the wounded Generalmajor Kirchheim and other senior officers privately communicated to OKH that continued attacks with DAK at its present low strength would merely deplete and demoralise it further.



Left: Sgt. John Brown, 1st Australian Infantry Battalion, looking back over his shoulder at the German soldiers who had just been killed. Right: A German soldier, possibly a member of the 5th Panzer Regiment, looking back over his shoulder at the Australian soldiers who had just been killed.



von Brauchitsch and Rommel
 in the desert, 1941
 von Brauchitsch and Rommel
 in the desert, 1941
 von Brauchitsch and Rommel
 in the desert, 1941

Nevertheless, Rommel personally directed another attack on the Tobruk perimeter on 16 April. This time he used Italian forces, tanks of Ariete Division and an infantry regiment of Trento Division. Some officers of 5th Light were attached as advisers but essentially it was an all-Italian affair. The chosen point was Ras a Madwa, a raised fortified strongpoint on the southwest corner of the perimeter. The attack was a complete fiasco. Many of the M13 tanks broke down on the way from the start line and most others were knocked out. When the Australian defenders counter-attacked many of the Italian infantry surrendered, and Rommel's HQ troops knocked out two of the retreating Italian tanks thinking them to be captured vehicles used in a counter attack.

Meanwhile, 5th Light Division was nursing its wounds, trying to repair and overhaul its equipment, and taking some respite for the previous hectic fortnight of combat and movement. With hard work, 5th Panzer Regiment managed to get 74 tanks repaired and running, half of them PzKpfw IIIs, rest PzKpfw IIIs and IVs. Rommel was now trying to beef up the DAK for another attack on Tobruk in May. Further units of 15th Panzer Division arrived in Tripoli, and the Infantry regiments of 15th Panzer were towed by Ju52 transport to Derna airfield.

put under command of 5th Light to give much needed infantry support. It had been another priority and by careful repairs and drawing on Italian equipment some 35 batteries were scraped together. At that time also more aircraft of all kinds were beginning to arrive to give a boost to air support throughout the desert campaign. Luftwaffe strength was always vastly outnumbered by the RAF.

The unsuccessful attacks on Tobruk, and the buccaneering taking of it against OKW and OKH advice in the first part of April were causing alarm at the High Command. Army C in C von Brauchitsch and his chief of staff were particularly disapproving and regarded Rommel with some disdain as a up provincial (he was from Schwabia) rather than a 'traditional' Prussian officer like themselves. When the complaints from Kirchheim and others came in they sent General Friedrich von Paulus, a deputy chief of staff and quartermaster general (later famous as the Sixth Army commander) sent out to North Africa to give them a first-hand report on the situation. He

27 April for a two-week stay, and made a rather conventional report that was more negative than positive. He noted the severe logistics problem. At that time DAK needed 30 000 tons of stores a month just to get going and up to 20 000 tons more for a big strategic reserve was to be built up. Most of the replenishment stores at the time had to be trucked—or occasionally flown—over 1,000 miles from Tripoli, though there were five harbours for small cargo boats at Derna and Gazala. Paulus suggested a new defence line at Gazala to reduce the supply distance, and the abandonment of any plans to take Tobruk or advance on to Egypt. He did commend sending out more supplies, more vehicles, more troops and more guns when they could be spared. This report by von Paulus was obviously influenced by his High Command staff thinking and it was what his bosses wanted to hear.

Rommel ignored the commendations. He knew that reinforcing supplies and men would never come in sufficient numbers and there would be many losses on the way from Sicily to Tripoli because the British dominated the Mediterranean Sea and the skies over it. He was enjoying fame around the world because of his spectacularly fast campaign in Cyrenaica, which was much admired. While von Paulus was in Cyrenaica, he saw first-hand Rommel's next attempt to take Tobruk in a five-day operation from 30 April to 4 May 1941. It proved to be a failure, but was much better controlled and handled than the previous attempts. Once again Rommel had chosen as the point of the attack Ras el Madawar on the southwest corner of the perimeter. Through the night of 30 April/1 May there was an artillery bombardment, and infantry raids with flamethrowers on the forward Australian defensive positions. There was also a fierce bombing raid by Stukas at sunset. By the time dawn broke the infantry mainly from 15th Panzer Division, were through the wire and opened up a 2.5km (1.5-mile) breach backed up by fire from mortars and infantry guns. At first light the first wave of 5th Panzer Regiment tanks went through the gap. About 2.5km (1.5 miles) back from the perimeter gap they noticed a second defence line behind dry stone walls. It concealed the inevitable 25pdr battery. As they approached this

Below: A German 88mm anti-aircraft gun in action. These guns were amongst the most powerful in the world at the time. The 88s were used in the early part of the Cyrenaican campaign, but by May 1941 they were almost completely out of action. The tanks also proved to be a logistical problem.

they ran into a minefield which, even worse, was laid in an echelon pattern so that following tanks that veered either right or left also ran into mines. In only minutes all but two of the 22 tanks had lost their tracks and were stuck only about 500 yards in front of the enemy defence line, from where Australian infantry fired on them with small arms. Fortunately, they didn't use the 25pdrs, partly because these tanks were already immobilised and partly because the gunfire set off more mines. The tank company commander ordered some of the immobilised tanks to fire back at the Australians, and he called in other covering fire from the following infantry and assault engineers. Under fire the tank tracks were repaired and all except five were able to withdraw, though it took until nearly nightfall before the last tank was recovered.



Meanwhile, one platoon of tanks had turned left and run westward, inside the perimeter, but these turned back when they were engaged by fire from the zone behind the dry stone wall. One tank took a direct hit on its engine compartment and the crew was captured by the Austrians from an adjacent defence point. The platoon were captured minutes later by the German assault engineers who had seen what had happened and came to the rescue.

Another more significant wave of 34 tanks (mainly PzKpfw IIs but with a few IIIs and IVs) from 5th Panzer Regiment moved forward into the perimeter behind and turned right, putting up a smokescreen as they ran eastwards inside the perimeter followed by infantry. They engaged and cleared each Austrian defence post in turn with heavy fire, under cover of which the infantry attacked. Two squadrons of A13s of 1RTR were brought up from the east to counter-attack, which they did with some success since they were able to fire from half-down positions. The 5th Panzer Regiment tanks pulled back about midday to refuel and rearm, then returned to the attack. But they were now hammered by the 25pdrs behind the stone defence line, then counter-attacked again by the A13s, plus some M10s from 7RTR. In a considerable melee, four British tanks were lost and others severely damaged, but the German tank company also suffered losses and damage, and at nightfall they withdrew back to the Ras al Madawar position. By then only half of the 5th Panzer Regiment's 70 tanks that went into action on that day, against the battlerworthy and 5th Light, had lost 1,200 dead and wounded, many of

them Desert Fighting Vehicles, could be used, even as fuelboxes, up to the end of the war.





from the newly arrived 15th Panzer Division infantry unit that had been under command. This was such a costly battle that Rommel could not sustain his attack. He realised that Tobruk was too tough a nut to crack without more forces. Though he held on to the Ras a Madawar position for some months to remind the Tobruk garrison of the DAK's presence, the key units of 5th Light withdrew to lick their wounds, and for the next ten days there was a lull in the action.

There were few signs that the British were aware of the DAK's presence. The only sign was the presence of a few German troops in the area. There was a small German garrison in the area.

OPERATION 'BREVITY'

Ultra intercepts gave the British C-in-C, General Wavell, the contents of the von Paulus report which had been transmitted to OKW in Germany on 12 May. In addition reports from Tobruk indicated how weak the DAK appeared to be. The apparent prospects looked good for the British. If the von Paulus recommendations were acted upon, the DAK would pull back to Gazala and it still did not have all of 15th Panzer Division in place to strengthen it. On 13 May, therefore, Wavell ordered an offensive—Operation 'Brevity'—to start on 15 May. This was to be commanded by Brigadier W. H. F. 'Strafer' Gott. He had already had a clash with Combat Group Knabe—the small force named after its commander, comprising 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion and 15th Motorcycle Battalion—sent in early April to secure the Cyrenaica-Egypt frontier. On 25 April this small group had launched a bold attack against Gott's small frontier guard force, which drew back to Buq Buq leaving the Halfaya Pass in German hands.

For Operation Brevity Gott had under command 22nd Guards (Motorised) Brigade, artillery, 11th Hussars, 7th Armoured Division Support Group, 2RTR and 4RTR which together made up 7th Armoured Brigade. The main units involved had to make a 100-mile move up from Mersa Matruh. The ambitious objective was to

sweep the German forces from the border, join up with the Tobruk garrison, and use that as a springboard to push the DAK further west. But it was an embarrassing failure for Rommel. Had under his command a very effective Wireless Intercept Section (*Fernmeldeaufklärung*) commanded by an astute expert in his field, Seeböhm, who time and again was was able to interpret British intentions by going over the radio traffic. By this means Rommel got wind of the British moves and ordered 5th Light's tanks to the frontier area.

The British attack secured Halfaya Pass easily, for it was held by Italian troops, 500 of whom were captured, though not before their guns had knocked out seven Matilda tanks of 7RTR. Sollum, lightly held, was also taken by a tank attack but the rest of 4RTR, with infantry support, approached Capuzzo, they were attacked on the flanks by Combat Group Knabe, who disabled seven Matildas by aiming at the rear tracks. 2RTR formed the left wing of the attack and intended to swing round behind Capuzzo and secure Sid Aze to cut off the expected German retreat from the border. However, they encountered first a 5th Light motorised infantry column heading for Capuzzo, then 5th Panzer Regiment's tanks following up. With the force now outnumbering the British, whose tank losses had been large, Goll called off the offensive and withdrew through Halfaya Pass, which was left guarded by a Battalion Coldstream Guards and the nine remaining 4RTR Matildas.

Halfaya Pass was strategically valuable, however, and as soon as the newly arrived tanks of 15th Panzer Division could be brought up to Cyrenaica, Rommel used them to increase his available tanks to produce his largest tank force yet. On 26 May, he put in an assault that involved a 15th Panzer Infantry battalion, with artillery support, attacking from the west, a battalion of 8th Panzer Regiment tanks moving around the Halfaya Pass escarpment and attacking from the east (i.e. the British side) and a 5th Panzer Regiment battalion attacking from the southeast. A company of the latter succeeded in overrunning and capturing a British 25pdr battery by the infrequently used ploy of ignoring orders. The company commander requested permission from the battalion commander to eliminate the 25pdrs, which was causing trouble. The battalion commander told him to hold back, but the company commander decided to attack anyway because the guns were such a threat to his tanks. Fedwebel Wilhelm Wendt, who led a charge into the 25pdrs with his Panzer IV, was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class, in this action.

With Halfaya Pass under threat from all sides, the Coldstream Guards and 4RTR's Matildas had no option but to make a fighting withdrawal, which they did with some losses, including six of the tanks. Halfaya Pass was once again in German hands.

Despite what amounted to valiant and considerate leadership during the hard fighting of April and May 1942, Rommel decided that Generalleutnant Streich, the divisional commander, should be dismissed. Oberst Olrich, 5th Panzer Regiment commander, should be dismissed for the Halfaya Pass action. He also ordered the court martial of one of the 4RTR battalion commanders who declined to attack Matilda tanks. Rommel undoubtedly wanted 'new brooms' and he had cashiered both Streich and Olrich severally.

Below: German tanks in the background approach a British Matilda tank knocked out by one of the 88s in the Halfaya Pass





the past as previously noted. Streich's fellow officers considered he had been unfairly and meanly treated for he had a good reputation for leadership, bravery, tank handling, politeness and humanity and Olrich was highly regarded, too. Both had demonstrated their qualities well during the Cyrenaica campaign despite the differences with Rommel along the way.

As Streich's replacement Rommel brought in Generalmajor Johann von Ravenstein (confirmed 23 July 1941) promoted from the command of one of the 5th Panzer Regiment battalions. Von Brauchitsch, the Army C in C, was disturbed by such high profile dismissals and suggested command problems be handled more coolly and discreetly. Rommel justified his decisions by saying that both Streich and Olrich had 'failed completely' several times and often criticised his orders.

OPERATION 'BATTLEAXE'

Wavell's early May assessment of German strength and intentions in Cyrenaica encouraged Prime Minister Churchill to send much-needed tank reinforcements for the British Western Desert Force by means of a five-ship fast convoy through the Mediterranean to Alexandria. One ship was sunk en route, but the rest delivered 82 of the new Crusader cruiser tanks, 135 Matildas and—of more limited value—21 Vickers light tanks.

Lt-Gen Noel Beresford-Peerce took over command of Western Desert Force and was directed by Wavell to mount a new major offensive, Operation 'Battleaxe', on 15 June with the objective of relieving Tobruk and pushing the Germans back to the west of it. The British assessed the DAK to have about 300 tanks available at that time, compared with 200 British tanks. Actually DAK had only about 200, not all fit for service, and only about half these were PzKpfw IIIs and IVs, the rest being light IIs and Is.

By this time DAK had been fully joined by 15th Panzer Division (commanded by Generalmajor Walter Neumann-Sikow) so that the Brevity action had been the last where 5th Light had to bear the full brunt of action alone. From now on it would be truly operating as part of a corps command.

Above: German anti-aircraft gun firing at sea.

- There is an early observation post on the shoreward side of the gun, the remains of which are still visible. It was built out of the remains of a Light Division's anti-aircraft gun. The gun was also erected in a position which was used by the British.

After the recapture of Halfaya Pass on 27 May, Rommel left 15th Panzer Division defending the Cyrenaica-Egypt border area, and pulled 5th Light back to join the siege of Tobruk, with some elements at Gambut further east. 15th Panzer had also arrived with the Pak 38 50mm anti-tank gun, which was a useful addition and these were mostly deployed in positions between Hafid Ridge (south of Capuzzo) round to Halfaya. A key decision, however, was to deploy the Pak 18 88mm guns of 1st Battalion 33rd (Luftwaffe) Flak Regiment dug into well-protected sangars to guard Halfaya Pass. This was the first deliberate deployment by Rommel of the guns in the anti-tank role, though he had used them briefly in emergency in the 1940 Battle of Arras and at least once in the Cyrenaica campaign a Pak 88 had been aimed at a tank. The Luftwaffe flak unit was attached to 5th Light. It was the 88s that struck the first decisive blow that wrecked the British hopes for 'Battleaxe'.

The British master plan was for the 4th Indian Division (on the right flank with 4th Armoured Brigade giving tank support) to take Halfaya Pass, while 7th Armoured Division (less 4th Armoured Brigade) approached inland above the coastal escarpment towards an area called Hafid Ridge where 15th Panzer Division was expected to be. Meanwhile in the centre, 22nd Guards Brigade was to advance and seize Capuzzo and Solum, backed by 4th Armoured Brigade who would move on to them after the Halfaya Pass action. With all these objectives secured, 22nd Armoured Division was to drive on the 80 miles to Tobruk and they and Tobruk garrison forces would then force the DAK back on the Derna-Mechili line.

On paper this looked good, but British staff work often made wrong assumptions. In this case, understandably perhaps, the deployment and power of the 88mm guns was overlooked. The approach to the Halfaya Pass at dawn on 15 June was met by silence as though the defenders were unaware of the attack. But at 09.00hrs, when the British Matildas advanced, they were decimated by fire from the 88s sunk deep in the sangars. 'They are tearing my tanks to bits', were the last words heard over the radio from the commander of C Squadron 4RTR which had put in the main attack. All the Matildas were destroyed except one and the follow-up infantry never went in. The towed 25pdr battery intended to have given fire support did not arrive as its vehicles got stuck in sand on the approach.

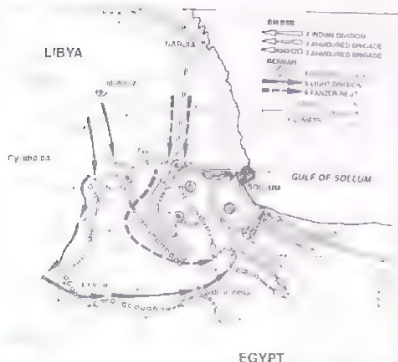
In the centre 7RTR of 4th Armoured Brigade enjoyed more success. They did successfully take Capuzzo after some close-quarter fighting. It was quite light here and some of Rommel's decoy tanks were encountered.

On the left flank 7th Armoured Division, with some of the new Crusaders as well as the old A13s, made a slow late start, ran into well-concealed 50mm anti-tank guns at Hafid Ridge and suffered losses, but counter-attacked. Attacking

Right: The British made good use of Portees - trucks carrying 2pdr anti-tank guns. The vehicles shown, however, are improvised Portees, being trucks carrying captured Italian 4.2 inch anti-tank guns, here seen in place, in one of the defensive boxes which favoured the British.



Like operations in Sicily, showing the British attack and the German response.



dummy German eagles, they were ambushed by some 5th Light tanks and were then counter-attacked again in the evening by a larger 5th Light force before withdrawing back to the border wire to replenish and recover overnight. By now hardly any of the British objectives had been achieved, save for the taking of Capuzzo and half the British tanks had already been destroyed—some by mines but most by 50mm Pak 38s or the formidable 88s at Hallaya, which could outrange and penetrate any British tank. Rommel had seen British intentions and gained time during the day to rush 5th Light down from Tobruk and Gambut.

Next day 16 June Rommel ordered Generalmajor Neumann-Silkow to counter-attack and retake Capuzzo, while von Ravenstein in his first action as 5th Light commander was to take his division in a bold swing south of Hafid Ridge to outflank the intended British armoured thrust westward, then circle behind it at Sidi Omar and head for Hafaya Pass to cut off its retreat. This resulted in running battles all day, as the armour of both sides clashed and swerved apart after hard fighting. The British tanks did mighty damage to an unprotected 5th Light supply column, which was virtually destroyed. The hardy Fedwebe-Wendel added a Knight's Cross to his Iron Cross that day for spotting and directing fire on a moving British Porter anti-tank battery to prevent it coming into action. A lucky 2pdr shot penetrated its PzKpfw V and badly wounded its driver and gunner, but did not destroy the tank. Meanwhile 15th Panzer Division had a tougher time. They found that the British Matilda tanks defending Capuzzo had dug themselves in hull-down during the night and so were well protected. Thirty (out of 80) attacking German tanks were lost.

In view of this on 17 June Rommel ordered just a token force of 8th Panzer Regiment to stay north of Capuzzo to prevent a breakout while the balance of the regiment's tanks and other 15th Panzer Division units swept south to join 5th Light in outflanking 7th Armoured Division. The British, fearing a new attack on Capuzzo and being cut off as a result, withdrew from Capuzzo.

At the British units were in confusion and had lost more than half their tanks. DAK's astute radio monitors heard radio traffic calling the Western Desert Force commander Beresford Pierce up to the front for consultation. Rommel interpreted this as meaning that British plans were in disarray, so called on 5th Light to run straight for Hafaya via Sidi Suleman to cut off the withdrawing British, while 15th Panzer Division swung parallel to them south of Hafid Ridge. A determined and stubborn fighting withdrawal and rearguard action by the surviving 15 Mat da tanks of 7RTR, plus bombing attacks by the RAF, slowed up the German advance and gave time for British forces to withdraw along the escarpment—virtually back to where they started. The British lost 80 percent of their tanks to all causes. The German losses were 62 tanks, but 50 of these were recovered and repaired from the battlefield.

This three-day battle was a triumph for Rommel and the DAK and a disaster for the British. Prime Minister Churchill decided a change of command was necessary to bring in new thinking. He appointed General Sir Claude Auchinleck as the new C-in-C Middle East, and sent Sir Archibald Wavell to take Auchinleck's place as C-in-C India.

Both sides made significant changes after 'Battleaxe'. The new British C-in-C took charge on 2 July and staved off Churchill's urgings for a new offensive that summer, calling instead for considerable reinforcements and time to prepare a very large winter offensive. He suggested his expanded forces should include two or three more armoured divisions. This resulted in the setting up of a new command, Eighth Army (effective September 26, but staffed well before that) commanded by General Sir Alan Cunningham. At the time he was a highly regarded national hero, having liberated Italian-occupied Somaliland and Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in spectacular style earlier in 1941. He was also a brother of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, then the successful commander of the British Mediterranean Fleet, whose submarines were making life hard for the DAK by sinking so many of its supply ships. About 270,000 tons of supplies of all kinds were lost in submarine or air attacks through 1941, equivalent to about eight months of basic needs.



Right: A soldier in 75th Anti-Aircraft Regiment, probably at Sidi Barrani, April 1941.



Cunningham had under command XIII Corps (once Western Desert Force but now reorganised as an infantry corps) and the new XXX Corps, which comprised three armoured divisions or brigades. This segregation into specialised roles at corps level proved to be a basic flaw as tactical flexibility (which was the basis of German success) was severely restricted. In XIII Corps were 1st New Zealand Division, 4th Indian Division, 1st Guards Brigade and 1st Army Tank Brigade, newly arrived from England with one regiment of Valentines and two of Matildas. In XXX Corps were 7th Armoured Division, 4th Armoured Brigade Group, 22nd Guards (Motor) Brigade and 1st South African Division. In reserve was 2nd South African Division.

This huge increase in resources, though not fully up to Auchinleck's desired even put a powerful British and Commonwealth force in the field with 175 000 men and 736 tanks. There were 259 tanks in reserve and another 96 still en route from Britain in addition to these forces. 32nd Army Tank Brigade with Matildas was landed by sea at Tobruk in September and the Australian forces there were withdrawn to Egypt and replaced by British, South African and Polish formations.

There were changes, too, on the German side. Rommel and his DAK were nominally answerable to the Italian C-in-C in Cyrenaica, General Gariboldi, whose staff actually gave Rommel a free hand. Back in Germany the Army Command (OKH) was still extremely nervous of Rommel and his activities. So General Halder had the idea of sending a senior staff officer, Generalmajor Alfred Gause, and a big team of staff officers to be attached to General Gariboldi and his Comando Supremo HQ. They arrived almost without warning on 11 June to be the official liaison team between OKH and the Italian C-in-C. The Italians regarded this as an insult and an intrusion, and Rommel could see it was clearly intended to clip his wings. He outsmarted OKH by putting up a much better, and ultimately very logical alternative, accepted by Army C-in-C von Brauchitsch, that the new Panzergruppe Afrika be formed (effective 31 July 1941) commanded by Rommel with Gause as

Above: 5th Anti-Aircraft Regiment's searchlights showing a German V-2 rocket falling at a quiet spot over the English Channel. Below: British Matilda tanks in action.

his chief of staff and Gause's team as the Gruppe staff. In this new arrangement Panzergruppe Afrika would have under command the original DAK (5th Light and 15th Panzer), strengthened by a new German infantry division and the Italian Savona infantry division. The Italian forces would form XX Italian Corps (with Trento, Brescia, Pavia and Bologna divisions) and XX Mobile Corps (with the Aniele Armored Division and Trieste Motorised Division). General Gariboldi was replaced by General Bastico, who commanded the Italian forces and on paper was still the C-in-C.

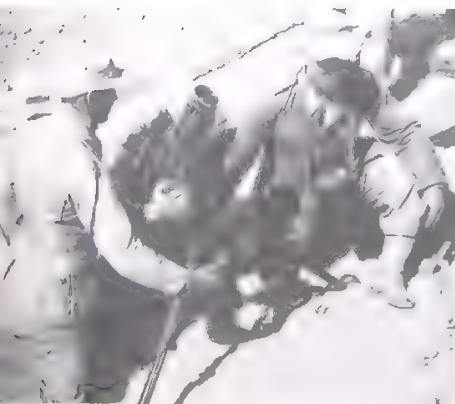
Effectively what this achieved was to give Rommel his head—the opposite of the original OKH intention. In the process it tidied up the problem of assorted Italian units which had previously only had a vague claim of command. Generalmajor Ludwig Crüwell then came out from Germany to replace Rommel as DAK commander.

5TH LIGHT TO 21ST PANZER

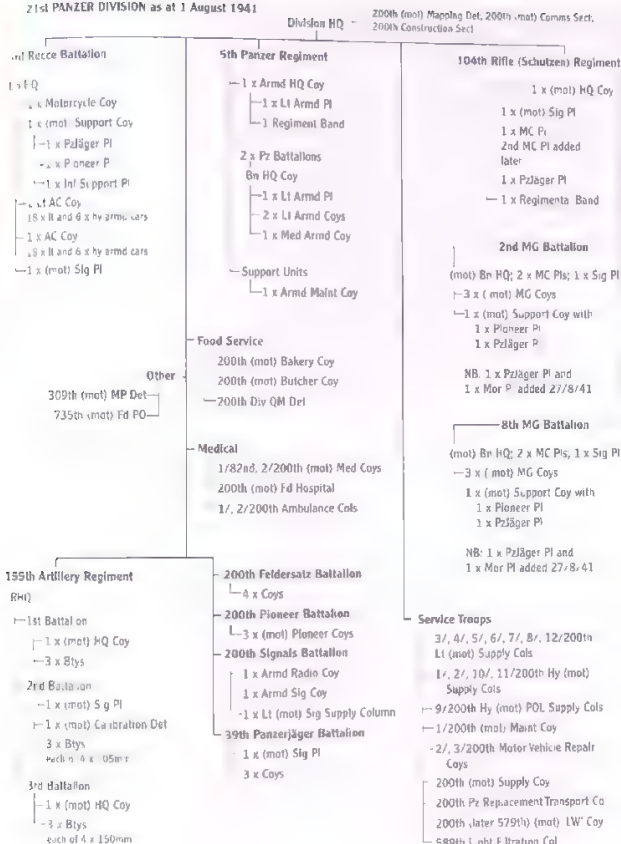
Panzergruppe Afrika was officially instituted on 31 July 1941 and a benefit in kind came the way of 5th Light, too, for on the following day, 1 August 1941, it was renamed 21st Panzer Division, reflecting the new DAK status as a true corps of divisions and support troops. Much of the change was on paper, though there were new staff officers. The 1a was Major von Heudruck, the 1b Hauptmann Böhm and the 1c Oberstmann Rickert.

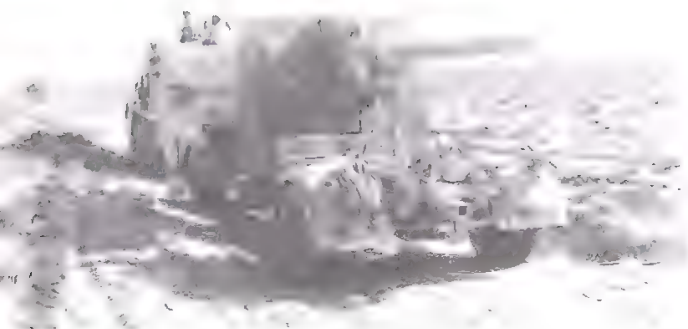
Additional units came under command to enlarge the division to something closer to the theoretical establishment of a panzer division. Most important was 15th Motorcycle Battalion, which was transferred from 15th Panzer Division, though the unit had been operating under 5th Light command in any case, right

from its arrival as vanguard unit of 15th Panzer. Also from 15th Panzer came 104th Rifle (Schützen) Regiment. Newly formed was 155th Artillery Regiment, which was made up from three existing battalions: the first two with motorised 105mm field howitzer batteries while the third had heavy batteries of 150mm and 100mm K18 guns. 2nd Machine Gun Battalion transferred to 15th Panzer Division on this reorganisation date, and the attached 33rd Flak Regiment who operated the key 88s left the division to become corps troops. During August many of the support companies were reorganised and streamlined, and extra service and support units joined including a mobile bakery, butcher, maintenance, supply and repair companies. Divisional HQ was set up at Bardia. As noted earlier, 90th Light (Africa) Division was also formed and came under DAK command during this period.



21st PANZER DIVISION as at 1 August 1941







On the left, the machine gun of the 1st Group of the 1st Division of the 1st Army. The machine gun is mounted on a tripod and is being operated by a soldier. The machine gun is mounted on a tripod and is being operated by a soldier.



The machine gun of the 1st Group of the 1st Division of the 1st Army. The machine gun is mounted on a tripod and is being operated by a soldier.

The machine gun of the 1st Group of the 1st Division of the 1st Army. The machine gun is mounted on a tripod and is being operated by a soldier.

The machine gun of the 1st Group of the 1st Division of the 1st Army. The machine gun is mounted on a tripod and is being operated by a soldier.

The machine gun of the 1st Group of the 1st Division of the 1st Army. The machine gun is mounted on a tripod and is being operated by a soldier.



During the summer months Rommel moved both 21st and 15th Panzer Divisions to the area between Tobruk and the frontier and ordered extensive exercises to perfect tank attack, support and anti-tank techniques. Most important of these was the idea of firing the 88 direct from its cradle on a towing platform without stopping to emplace it. At Halaya and other defence points, the 88s had been emplaced conventionally, on the ground and off the mobile towing trolleys, though well concealed in sangars. One battery had remained with the tank battalions, however, for possible deployment elsewhere. But in the famous running fire fight with 7th Armoured Division in the Sidi Omar area on 16 June, these mobile 88s had been fired straight from the wheeled towing trailers without being conventionally emplaced. This was done as an extemporised act in the heat of battle simply because there just wasn't time to emplace the gun first in a running fight. The idea worked, however, and now it became the normal operational technique for using the 88 in the anti-tank role. It gave immense extra fire power and flexibility to the armoured units, particularly at the time when the most powerful tank-mounted gun with DAK was the 50mm in the PzKpfw III.

With its ability to fire straight from its trailer safely proven, the 88 batteries could now move mixed in among the tanks, a facility made possible by the reliable Sd Kfz 7 semi-track tractor which also carried the crew and ammunition. The exercises tried various ways of deploying the towed 88 with tanks. They could travel inside the group and move to the front, sides or rear as required of a moving formation. If the tanks stopped to exchange fire, the 88s could be moved out to protect the flanks, or they could move out to the front of the formation to take well-aimed long range shots at the enemy and swiftly retire again into the heart of the formation.

Skillfully deployed, they proved to have even greater value as an anti-tank weapon than the original deployment at Halaya had suggested. The previous use of a battery of 88s in the field at the unsuccessful attempt to take Tobruk on 14 April was not in the anti-tank role but in the infantry support role firing 'HE air bursts' though the results were negligible and the guns were too exposed and immobile. Now Rommel and all the fighting units of DAK fully appreciated the true value of the 88 as a highly mobile anti-tank weapon of great power, and the 88s became legendary, intensely feared by opposing tankmen.

This flexibility of thought and imaginative and co-operative use of arms was key factor of the German success in the desert war and seems to have more than made up for total German lack of desert war experience before 1941. The British may have had a long tradition of service under desert conditions, but they had much more compartmentalised style of thought. Infantry tanks and artillery all in their own ways of doing things and there was little inclination at all even to integrate and co-operate. For example the British had readily available many greater numbers of a gun that was similar – and in some ways superior – to the 88. This was the famous 3.7 inch AA gun. It could have been used in the anti-tank role just like the 88, but it was strictly limited to the AA use for which it had been designed. Only on a few unauthorised occasions was it used by the British against enemy tanks. Such was the orthodox thinking at British staff level that it was so months after the 'Battleaxe' debacle that the part played by the German 88s was not appreciated. The British staff just hadn't seen that AA guns could be used for anything other than anti-aircraft defence.

Much the same was true when it came to armoured warfare. The Germans had fewer tanks than the British and many were small PzKpfws and IIs. But in German armoured units there was no distinction between 'cruiser' tanks and dedicated

Before: Because of equipment shortages, the Afrika Korps had to be equipped in repair and maintenance areas. The 88s in the foreground are being moved from an armoured tractor.



infantry tanks both of which existed in the British Army, each having different speed limitations. Artillery units were also handled differently. When they were available, artillery units were deployed in fully integrated measure by panzer units but this was not always the case with British tank formations where artillery was often kept at arm's length.

The myth grew that German tanks were superior to British tanks in armour and firepower. In fact, the differences were not all that great, at least in 1941. The British 2pdr gun was, in fact, marginally superior to the equivalent German 37mm gun. The early versions of the PzKpfw III and IV were not as well armoured as they needed to be, though they were superior in reliability and output quantity. But the Matilda tank, slow as it was, was actually feared by the DAK in 1941, for it was too well armoured for their tank guns to penetrate it. It took an 88 to smash a Matilda.

Formation of Panzergruppe Afrika brought in the need for even more supplies to keep the bigger force going. As before, there were big losses in transit. Early in 1941 30 000 tons a month was the bare minimum just to keep going, but in July–October 1941 72 000 tons, the average monthly arrival, was inadequate and in some subsequent months it was much lower than this.

Careful husbandry was the order of the day, and fullest use was made of all kinds of captured British stores: fuel and equipment including lorries, tanks, guns and armoured cars. A well-stocked maintenance base was set up at Gambut in the summer of 1941, and here equipment was repaired, rebuilt, cannibalised and even fabricated. Wrecked tanks were carefully recovered from the battlefield and by using all these ploys the limited arrival of new tanks and vehicles could be boosted. During that summer, these methods increased the tanks available to 15th and 21st Panzer Division up to around 250 each, with some limited reserve stock as well.

It is also worth noting that, in spite of the value of the 88 in summer 1941, new arrivals of these weapons boosted the DAK numbers to only 35. Of these 12 were kept in mobile batteries to operate with the panzer divisions, the other 23 going to Halfaya and other frontier defence areas.

After all this training and preparation the first operation of 21st Panzer Division under von Ravenstein's command proved to be a near disaster. Rommel was planning a decisive assault on Tobruk for the autumn, but got wind of a British build-up of forces near the frontier, suggesting that another big offensive was planned. His air reconnaissance showed signs of a big supply dump being built up 15 miles inside the frontier to support a large attacking force. In fact he was being duped by the British: the supply dump was a dummy even though a real one was built at the same spot. Later Rommel ordered 21st Panzer Division to mount a 'reconnaissance in force' to investigate the dump and attack any British forces found in the area. So on 14 September the division, accompanied by Rommel in his *Maumet*, swept round Sidi Omar and drove east across the border into Egypt. The border area was guarded by 7th Armoured Division Support Group who, acting



Although the camouflage stripes on the German Panzer tank were completely ineffective in the desert, they were a distinctive feature of the DAK's tank units.

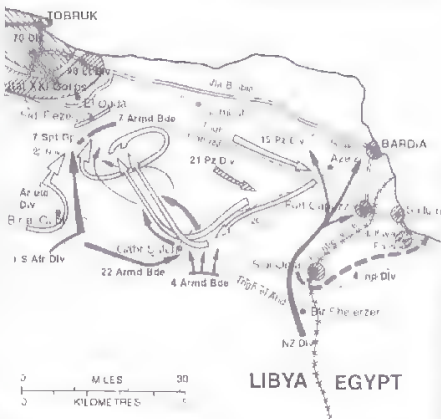
1 cv were backed up by 96 towed Pak 38 50mm anti tank guns.

November 1941 was a bad month for the German forces in North Africa. Rommel's plans to retake Tobruk were foisted when a resupply convoy from Sicily was completely wiped out on 9 November, nothing got through. In mid-November Romme flew to Rome, partly to spend a brief leave with his family but also to meet Mussolini and Italian military leaders. Better ways of protecting convoys to Libya was high on the agenda. The assault on Tobruk was rescheduled for 21 November, and then put back to 3 December. A deciding factor was the exceptionally bad weather, a period of rain, storms and floods which set in on 16 November along the coast and over the Gebel Akhbar area. This prevented a reconnaissance so no British movements could be detected, and the British also kept strict radio silence.

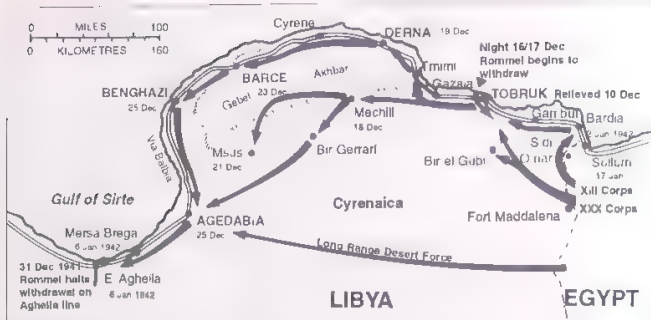
Rommel arrived back from Rome on 17 November and got on with detailed planning for the taking of Tobruk which included an attack by 21st Panzer from its eastern base near Benghazi. Romme had also sited his HQ there. Because of Ultra intercepts Eighth Army knew of Romme's intentions and the positions of key formations. So Operation Crusader was brought forward to 18 November, when at dawn deep in the desert the armour of XXX Corps moved in the direction of Tobruk. It was spread over a broad front of over 20 miles and 7th Armoured Division alone was spread over an area of 100 square miles. The 7th Armoured Division's armoured cars were in the van of this big formation, acting as a reconnaissance force.

No. 111 CV was spotted or expected by the Germans. When first seen by an armoured car patrol of 15th Panzer west of Sidi Omar at about 10.30 hrs, the forward British units were reported to Romme as a reconnaissance force and was still in my mind that, two days later on 20 November after considerable fighting had already taken place, the XXX Corps' columns pressed on, still engaged. However, as they crossed the area west of Sidi Omar, they started to slow up as they ran into the nasty rain and mud of the coastal area weather system.

Against Crusader it was 3rd Recce Battalion of 21st Panzer who were first in action. The Stuart of 4th Armoured Brigade which had covered the southern flank of XXX Corps, moved into the gap between Sidi Omar and Gabr Saleh at 17.4 hrs, and in the dusk clashed with an armoured car patrol of 3rd Recce. Some of the Stuarts pursued the patrol towards Derna and the armoured cars reported 20 tanks attacking. When von Ravenstein first heard the morning report of tanks being sighted by 3rd Recce Battalion he sent a tank company and artillery battery soon to back up the armoured cars and when he received the 3rd Recce



ABOVE: Operation Crusader. Rommel's counter-attacks, and the British response, are shown on the map. The British were forced to retreat to the coast.



Notes: 1. The map is a simplified representation of the terrain. 2. The dates are approximate and may vary slightly from the actual events.

Battalion's signal in the evening he planned to send 5th Panzer Regiment south overnight to attack the 4th Armoured Brigade Stuarts at Gabr Saleh.

However, Rommel countermanded this order and still maintained there was no threat. He thought it a feint or at best a diversion to dissuade him from attacking Tobruk. Even detailed movement information gleaned from XIII Corps prisoners taken at the border by the Italians failed to convince him. Hence, there were no German counter-attacks on 19 November, but there were limited British forays in the west including the capture of Sidi Rezegh airfield and the movement of 7th Armoured Brigade up to Sidi Rezegh, just south of Tobruk.

General Cruewell interpreted the attack on 3rd Recce, and a second clash with them, as an indication of the British line of attack. He ordered von Ravenstein to form a special force—5th Panzer Regiment with 12 105mm howitzers and four of the 88s—to move south from Cambut to Gabr Saleh and attack 4th Armoured Brigade there. This force was called Battle Group Stephan after its commander. Rommel watched the group depart that afternoon.

Chasing 3rd Recce's armoured cars and carrying out reconnaissance sweeps themselves had split up the 4th Armoured Brigade units. Battle Group Stephan encountered 8th Hussars late in the afternoon northeast of Gabr Saleh. In the vicious fire fight that followed, 20 Stuarts were knocked out, many by 88s using the new tactic of firing from the rear. Carriages 5RTTR was called up to aid the Hussars and lost another three Stuarts—though 12 of the knocked out tanks were later recovered. Battle Group Stephan lost only three tanks, with four more damaged but recoverable. The two sides withdrew for the night, but Battle Group Stephan, who had planned to move to Sidi Omar, was now stuck awaiting fuel from its supply column.

Cruewell assumed that 4th Armoured Brigade was the main British force and moved 15th Panzer and the rest of 21st Panzer south to attack. At dawn on 20 November the elements of 4th Armoured Brigade continued to engage Battle Group Stephan in what became a running fight. Eight more Stuarts were knocked out and four German tanks, two of them PzKpfw IIs. After two hours Battle Group Stephan moved off to the northwest to rendezvous with the rest of the division now advancing southwards. The British thought they were withdrawing, beaten. By

21st Panzer needed to refuel so the rest of the day's fighting was done by 4th Panzer, also leading to more heavy tank losses for 4th Armoured Brigade. By now Rommel had belatedly realised the full British intent on and ordered 1st DAK to move west at dawn to strike at 7th Armoured Brigade and other units west of Sidi Rezegh. 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions did this so successfully that when dawn broke 4th Armoured Brigade (and 22nd who had by now arrived in support) were surprised to find them gone, with the last units just disappearing west. A limited pursuit was called off and not resumed until that afternoon when it then ran into rain and deep mud which slowed progress.

By the time 4th and 22nd Armoured Brigades arrived at Sidi Rezegh at dusk on 24 November it was too late to help 7th Armoured Brigade which had been a bit wiped out that morning. The day had started with 7th Armoured being ordered to move north to meet the Tobruk breakout force at El Duda. The British assumed that the apparent withdrawal of Battle Group Stephens the previous day meant the end of the German threat. However just before the attack was about to begin two big German tank groups were seen coming in on the right flank. These were 21st and 17th Panzer Divisions. A full cry 7th Armoured Brigade was therefore, forced to split its resources, 7th Hussars and 2RTR moved east to meet and hold the approaching Germans while 6RTR bore the brunt of the charge for Tobruk. This was a fatal move. 6RTR lost 59 tanks in a futile charge to the east, 7th Hussars were virtually wiped out by 21st Panzer in a short running fight marked by the bold use of 88mm and 50mm anti-tank guns often sited behind dunes, and with the 88s firing on the move. By the end of the day only 12 7th Hussars tanks, some damaged, were left running. Meanwhile 16 tanks of 21st Panzer attacked 7th Armoured's Support Group, but here in a static fight near Sidi Rezegh airfield they had less success for they met their old bogey, 25pdrs firing over dunesights. Manneds by 60th Field Regiment RA the 25pdrs succeeded in holding 21st Panzer off.

The Germans called for a Stuka attack on the guns but this failed due to inaccurate bombing. A counter attack made by five support and HQ company Crusaders was unsuccessful as all were hit. Further fire by the 25pdrs held off the 21st Panzer's tanks but ammunition was running low on both sides. As the German tanks closed in 22nd Armoured Brigade arrived from Gab Sidi and the Germans withdrew. 2RTR was engaged by 15th Panzer Division and met a similar fate. Only the 7th Hussars making it a back day indeed for 7th Armoured Brigade. While all this was going on, Rommel himself had got together a scratch force of reserves from Gambut and used them to repulse the British breakout from Tobruk.

At this stage in the operations XXX Corps had taken such a pasting in its attempt to relieve Tobruk and bring DAK's tanks into a set piece battle that a more prudent commander might have been inclined to call a day and withdraw gracefully. Unfortunately the Eighth Army commander did not have the full story. He had received optimistic reports of many German tanks destroyed and enemy movements westwards but the full story of high British losses was still unknown thanks to scattered units and poor communications. The failure to link up with the Tobruk Garrison displeased him and he suggested bringing up the 1st South African Division from Bir Cubi to help in another attempt on the morrow.

DAK's leaders decided to move away and reposition overnight. Crüwell wanted to move 21st Panzer and 15th Panzer back near their base at Gambut where their supplies were but Rommel had now seen what was going on and had other ideas. He ordered them to form a defence line facing south along the escarpment from El Duda to Bel Ahmed so putting themselves between Tobruk and the British. Crüwell modified this idea by placing only 21st Panzer there, and positioning 15th Panzer



Top: A soldier next to a motorcycle. Bottom: A group of soldiers in a desert environment.

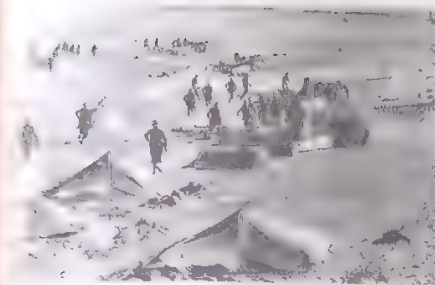
to the east of the British and south of Gambut. On 22 November the withdrawal of these movements was spotted by the British tanks and a few even exchanged fire, as the Germans pulled away. The movements were interpreted by the British as a withdrawal, so the British tanks remained in the Sidi Rezeqh area, mostly near the airport. They included 22nd Armoured Division, who had come late on the scene and had so far avoided major engagements. The chance was too good to miss. Rommel told von Ravenstein to attack 7th Armoured Support Group and other units at the airport that afternoon.

So on the afternoon of 21 November, 21st Panzer's 155th Rifle Regiment put in a brisk infantry attack from the north, engaging the British infantry protecting the airport. Fire support came from Artillery Group Botcher, an army artillery for which Rommel had assembled to bombard Tobruk. Meanwhile, one tank battalion of 5th Panzer Regiment swept around Sidi Rezeqh and charged the airport from the west. In the vigorous defence of the airfield that followed, 7th Armoured Support Group's commander, Brigadier Jock Campbell, won the VC. Tanks of 22nd Armoured Brigade tried counter attacks but were ineffective in the smoke and confusion. Some of them fired at the approaching tanks of 4th Armoured Brigade by mistake as they too came in to counter attack. Von Ravenstein's tanks were, of course, ably supported by his anti-tank guns in their flexible role. In the smoke, dust and carnage, the British units had little option but to withdraw, and they retreated south of the airfield over a protecting ridge. As dusk fell, however, 15th Panzer



Right: Anti-aircraft gun in action. From left to right: Tobruk as part of Artillery Group Botcher. This unit's commander Jock Campbell was highly regarded by the Germans.

Left: A battery of 15th New Zealand guns at El Alamein. Below: German soldiers captured by the British during the battle.



arrived from the northeast and caused extra chaos. By the end of the act on 22nd Armoured Brigade was down to 34 running tanks and 7th Armoured only had 15. German tank losses were very few. As a bonus, 15th Panzer also captured the HQ and staff of 4th Armoured Brigade in the night attack, but this was more than offset by the capture on the 23rd of the DAK's entire communication centre and staff (and valuable cyphers) from their base near Gambut as 6th New Zealand Division moved in from the XIII Corps front.

That day 23 November, was a Sunday—*Totenensonntag* (Remembrance Sunday) in the German calendar. It proved to be an apt name for it saw huge carnage and losses inflicted on both sides. Rommel ordered that the remaining 7th Armoured Division forces south of Sidi Rezegh be crushed by encirclement. Cruwell did this by charging 15th Panzer Division, plus 21st and 5th Panzer Regiment, down from the north, sweeping west, and joining up with the Italian Ariete Division coming up from the southwest.

British tanks and trucks were dotted everywhere and the shooting was wild on both sides. Cruwell did not have Rommel's instinct for wise commitment. He lined up his tanks, the Ariete Division and 15th Rifle Regiment in trucks and charged them northwards through the British forces. It was spectacular but wasteful, for it gave unnecessary exposure to his tanks. German casualties and losses were heavy, including 72 tanks out of the 162 that attacked. The British were decimated, too, but at heavy cost to the DAK. Rommel now took charge and decided to capitalise on the destruction and disarray of the British by making a dash to the border in a diversionary but spectacular sweep with his command car leading 21st Panzer and 15th Panzer following a long behind. The column at one time was 40 miles long. Back in the border area at the time things were quiet, Cunningham and his corps commanders were having a conference near the border and staff cars and trucks were parked everywhere. Suddenly out of the blue they found Rommel and his tanks bearing down on them and everyone scattered and ran east for Egypt including the generals in what was later jokingly called the Matruh Stakes.

However the DAK was too depleted for Rommel's sweep to do much damage but it had a good psychological effect. In military terms it was questionable—spectacle for spectacle's sake. It was in the skirmish actions of this sweep 24–27

November) that the DAK finally found a way of tackling the 25pdrs that had given them so much trouble by firing over open sights. They found the best technique was to give the batteries a plastering of HE from the short 75mm guns of the Panzer divisions. If necessary doing it over and over again until the crews were killed or cowed. Then the tanks would go in, aiming to crush the gun trails under the tracks.

The 'Crusader' offensive had been so clumsily handled that Auchinleck's British C-in-C was persuaded Cunningham was too demoralised to continue. He replaced him, therefore, with his own chief of staff, Maj Gen Sir Neil Ritchie. The Sid Rezegh battles had also exhausted and depleted the German's de Rommel's divisions on their border sweep had only shaky communications with Panzergruppe HQ due to the loss of the DAK's signal centre. Faulty communications and mistakes Tobruk was now close to being relieved by the New Zealanders under General Bernard Freyberg coming up from the XIII Corps' front. In Rommel's absence part of the Tobruk garrison managed a breakout. Elements of 21st Panzer on the border got the message and headed back to Tobruk. Rommel only got the message later and brought the rest of 21st Panzer, plus 15th Panzer, back with him. A further night battle known as 2nd Sid Rezegh took place yet again around the battered airfield area. This stretched over two days, 27-29 November, and was bloody indeed. The DAK tanks plus Ariete Division surrounded and pummelled the New Zealanders and the fighting was fierce.

During this, 21st Panzer suffered a setback on 29 November when von Ravenstein en route for a meeting with Cruwell, lost his way and his car ran into an outpost of 25th NZ Battalion where he was captured. The wily British took him well. He had lunch with Auchinleck's Director of Military Intelligence (during which his tent was bugged) and from all that he said it was deduced how hard pressed the DAK was, how bad communications were and how difficult Rommel could be to work for. Oberstleutnant G. C. Knabe took temporary command of 21st Panzer after von Ravenstein's capture. Until Rommel appointed Generalleutnant Karl Bottcher commander the next day, switching him from command of the division's artillery group. The British armoured brigades had had time to recover and had a

Below: The 4th Mz 500/10 captured a 3.7cm Pak 36 gun and was sent to some motorised infantry company or another leaders to give fire support during an attack.





Above: A new style Kubewagen at Tobruk in 1941. Below: A German soldier in the desert near Gazala on the night of 11 December.

received some new tanks. They attacked the DAK from the south on 30 November but not in a co-ordinated or effective way.

For the rest of 2nd Sidi Rezegh 21st Panzer was engaged from the east while 15th Panzer was sent by Rommel in a classic encircling punch that virtually crushed the brave New Zealanders and restored the Tobruk siege. But it was a Pyrrhic victory for Rommel. There was a lull in the fighting on 1 December and Panzergruppe Afrika sat tight to see what the British would do. Probing attacks to the border area on 3 December found they were still there. In fact, under Ritchie Eighth Army had found a new optimism, and more reinforcements were coming up from Egypt. Rommel realised that the Eighth Army was capable of mounting more attacks and so, on 4 December, he decided to cut his losses, abandon Tobruk and pull his forces back to El Adem. Eighth Army moved up only to find the Germans still withdrawing as Rommel now took his tanks back to the Gazala line. By 11 December a lot of Panzergruppe Afrika was back at Gazala, some stragglers and some isolated posts at Bardia and the frontier, and was now down to only 40 operational tanks.

Operation Crusader had unexpectedly achieved its objective of driving the enemy out of Cyrenaica. The German defensive line, the Gazala Line, was shaky because it could be easily outflanked. This Eighth Army tried to do but ineffective and weak attempts were repulsed by 15th Panzer. Gazala was clearly too vulnerable, however, so on 16 December Rommel pulled all his forces back to



Official tank
strength at
15 August 1942

PzKpfw II	14
PzKpfw III	87
PzKpfw IV	18
PzBerWg	2
Total	121

first time the British were using the Grant (M3 medium) tank from America with its useful though limited 75mm gun. In this battle 21st Panzer nearly succeeded in taking the key 'Knightsbridge' box, but lost too many tanks due to the unexpected encounter with the Grants. By 5 June the bloody Gazala fighting had reached the stage known as The Cauldron. During the battle 21st Panzer secured the key Sidi Ridge from which counter-attacks could be staged. While 21st Panzer held this feature Rommel used his other divisions to roll up the British forces and win the day. British tank losses were huge, German much lighter.

As the British withdrew, Rommel finally took Tobruk in another three-pronged divisional attack. For this, on 20-21 June 21st Panzer formed the spearhead between 5th Panzer and 9th Light in an attack from the south-east. 21st Panzer fought a gruelling struggle to seize the town and the seaport, the brisk action ending with the tanks on the beachfront. The flank divisions, meanwhile, took on the dogged defenders inside the perimeter. Nearly 35,000 prisoners were taken in this attack. Deserted Eighth Army left a track. But Rommel's forces were weak, too dependent on British stores and vehicles to keep going. 21st and 15th Panzer only had 44 tanks between them, and when the Germans crossed into Egypt they estimated that four-fifths of their transport was British.

The Eighth Army decided to fall back to a defence line at Mersa Matruh but they did hardly reach there when Rommel struck on 26-27 June. In this action 21st Panzer was again the spearhead of a three-pronged assault sandwiched between 9th Light and 15th Panzer. They were key to rolling up the British rear (with Rommel riding with them) and Eighth Army now pulled back in some 300 miles, establishing a defence line at Alamein—at this stage no more than a few scattered pill-boxes. Rommel attacked on 1-3 July, but resolute British defence brought his advance into Egypt to a halt. It was the end of a war of

the British were using the Grant (M3 medium) tank from America with its useful though limited 75mm gun. In this battle 21st Panzer nearly succeeded in taking the key 'Knightsbridge' box, but lost too many tanks due to the unexpected encounter with the Grants. By 5 June the bloody Gazala fighting had reached the stage known as The Cauldron. During the battle 21st Panzer secured the key Sidi Ridge from which counter-attacks could be staged. While 21st Panzer held this feature Rommel used his other divisions to roll up the British forces and win the day. British tank losses were huge, German much lighter.

As the British withdrew, Rommel finally took Tobruk in another three-pronged divisional attack. For this, on 20-21 June 21st Panzer formed the spearhead between 5th Panzer and 9th Light in an attack from the south-east. 21st Panzer fought a gruelling struggle to seize the town and the seaport, the brisk action ending with the tanks on the beachfront. The flank divisions, meanwhile, took on the dogged defenders inside the perimeter. Nearly 35,000 prisoners were taken in this attack. Deserted Eighth Army left a track. But Rommel's forces were weak, too dependent on British stores and vehicles to keep going. 21st and 15th Panzer only had 44 tanks between them, and when the Germans crossed into Egypt they estimated that four-fifths of their transport was British.

The Eighth Army decided to fall back to a defence line at Mersa Matruh but they did hardly reach there when Rommel struck on 26-27 June. In this action 21st Panzer was again the spearhead of a three-pronged assault sandwiched between 9th Light and 15th Panzer. They were key to rolling up the British rear (with Rommel riding with them) and Eighth Army now pulled back in some 300 miles, establishing a defence line at Alamein—at this stage no more than a few scattered pill-boxes. Rommel attacked on 1-3 July, but resolute British defence brought his advance into Egypt to a halt. It was the end of a war of

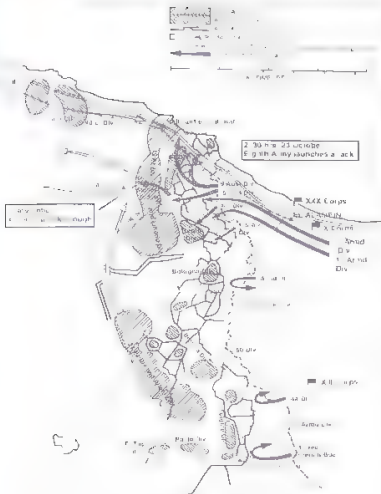
After: Alam Halfa

After the battle of Mersa Matruh, Eighth Army moved back to El Alamein, where Axis command planned to make the decisive battle. Retreat, which would prevent Axis forces taking all of Egypt. Forty miles inland from El Alamein was the impassable Qattara Depression.

Forming a natural boundary, it was not that possibly nor desirable to build a continuous defence line so the Mareth Line was actually held by a series of four defensive boxes, but with mobile divisional columns held back in the desert for flexible deployment. The southern tank box was about 30 miles long—and was open enough to surprise Rommel. Rommel decided to attack the Axis position on 1 July 1942, before Eighth Army had time to strengthen its defences. In what became known as the First Battle of Alamein, Rommel planned to cut off and bypass the Mareth Line on the coast with 90th Light, and then drive back and 1st Panzer Division south behind the British lines. However, strong resistance in the desert when he saw the arrival of mobile columns sent up Lark. Next day Rommel changed plans and ordered 1st and 2nd Panzer to move east along R. Matruh Road, then back to the coast. Superior numbers of British tanks forced it to be attacking DAK's southern flank. A total of 1,000 trucks cut off the British tanks. Lark suffered even more and was sent to a tank tank when the advance was halted. The British then attack was not pressed home with vigour, however allowing Lark to pull back with 1st Panzer covering the retreat.

In July, Lark received reinforcements, including more divisions and more tanks. Fighting continued in early July with British forces westwards from Mareth and a contest for Ruweisat Ridge involving 2nd Panzer.

However, but eventually this petered out. Rommel's attempt to outflank and roll up Eighth Army was at Alamein. On 30 August 1 September 1942, Lark now had 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th with the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111th, 112th, 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 122nd, 123rd, 124th, 125th, 126th, 127th, 128th, 129th, 130th, 131st, 132nd, 133rd, 134th, 135th, 136th, 137th, 138th, 139th, 140th, 141st, 142nd, 143rd, 144th, 145th, 146th, 147th, 148th, 149th, 150th, 151st, 152nd, 153rd, 154th, 155th, 156th, 157th, 158th, 159th, 160th, 161st, 162nd, 163rd, 164th, 165th, 166th, 167th, 168th, 169th, 170th, 171st, 172nd, 173rd, 174th, 175th, 176th, 177th, 178th, 179th, 180th, 181st, 182nd, 183rd, 184th, 185th, 186th, 187th, 188th, 189th, 190th, 191st, 192nd, 193rd, 194th, 195th, 196th, 197th, 198th, 199th, 200th, 201st, 202nd, 203rd, 204th, 205th, 206th, 207th, 208th, 209th, 210th, 211st, 212th, 213th, 214th, 215th, 216th, 217th, 218th, 219th, 220th, 221st, 222nd, 223rd, 224th, 225th, 226th, 227th, 228th, 229th, 230th, 231st, 232nd, 233rd, 234th, 235th, 236th, 237th, 238th, 239th, 240th, 241st, 242nd, 243rd, 244th, 245th, 246th, 247th, 248th, 249th, 250th, 251st, 252nd, 253rd, 254th, 255th, 256th, 257th, 258th, 259th, 260th, 261st, 262nd, 263rd, 264th, 265th, 266th, 267th, 268th, 269th, 270th, 271st, 272nd, 273rd, 274th, 275th, 276th, 277th, 278th, 279th, 280th, 281st, 282nd, 283rd, 284th, 285th, 286th, 287th, 288th, 289th, 290th, 291st, 292nd, 293rd, 294th, 295th, 296th, 297th, 298th, 299th, 300th, 301st, 302nd, 303rd, 304th, 305th, 306th, 307th, 308th, 309th, 310th, 311st, 312th, 313th, 314th, 315th, 316th, 317th, 318th, 319th, 320th, 321st, 322nd, 323rd, 324th, 325th, 326th, 327th, 328th, 329th, 330th, 331st, 332nd, 333rd, 334th, 335th, 336th, 337th, 338th, 339th, 340th, 341st, 342nd, 343rd, 344th, 345th, 346th, 347th, 348th, 349th, 350th, 351st, 352nd, 353rd, 354th, 355th, 356th, 357th, 358th, 359th, 360th, 361st, 362nd, 363rd, 364th, 365th, 366th, 367th, 368th, 369th, 370th, 371st, 372nd, 373rd, 374th, 375th, 376th, 377th, 378th, 379th, 380th, 381st, 382nd, 383rd, 384th, 385th, 386th, 387th, 388th, 389th, 390th, 391st, 392nd, 393rd, 394th, 395th, 396th, 397th, 398th, 399th, 400th, 401st, 402nd, 403rd, 404th, 405th, 406th, 407th, 408th, 409th, 410th, 411st, 412th, 413th, 414th, 415th, 416th, 417th, 418th, 419th, 420th, 421st, 422nd, 423rd, 424th, 425th, 426th, 427th, 428th, 429th, 430th, 431st, 432nd, 433rd, 434th, 435th, 436th, 437th, 438th, 439th, 440th, 441st, 442nd, 443rd, 444th, 445th, 446th, 447th, 448th, 449th, 450th, 451st, 452nd, 453rd, 454th, 455th, 456th, 457th, 458th, 459th, 460th, 461st, 462nd, 463rd, 464th, 465th, 466th, 467th, 468th, 469th, 470th, 471st, 472nd, 473rd, 474th, 475th, 476th, 477th, 478th, 479th, 480th, 481st, 482nd, 483rd, 484th, 485th, 486th, 487th, 488th, 489th, 490th, 491st, 492nd, 493rd, 494th, 495th, 496th, 497th, 498th, 499th, 500th, 501st, 502nd, 503rd, 504th, 505th, 506th, 507th, 508th, 509th, 510th, 511st, 512th, 513th, 514th, 515th, 516th, 517th, 518th, 519th, 520th, 521st, 522nd, 523rd, 524th, 525th, 526th, 527th, 528th, 529th, 530th, 531st, 532nd, 533rd, 534th, 535th, 536th, 537th, 538th, 539th, 540th, 541st, 542nd, 543rd, 544th, 545th, 546th, 547th, 548th, 549th, 550th, 551st, 552nd, 553rd, 554th, 555th, 556th, 557th, 558th, 559th, 560th, 561st, 562nd, 563rd, 564th, 565th, 566th, 567th, 568th, 569th, 570th, 571st, 572nd, 573rd, 574th, 575th, 576th, 577th, 578th, 579th, 580th, 581st, 582nd, 583rd, 584th, 585th, 586th, 587th, 588th, 589th, 590th, 591st, 592nd, 593rd, 594th, 595th, 596th, 597th, 598th, 599th, 600th, 601st, 602nd, 603rd, 604th, 605th, 606th, 607th, 608th, 609th, 610th, 611st, 612th, 613th, 614th, 615th, 616th, 617th, 618th, 619th, 620th, 621st, 622nd, 623rd, 624th, 625th, 626th, 627th, 628th, 629th, 630th, 631st, 632nd, 633rd, 634th, 635th, 636th, 637th, 638th, 639th, 640th, 641st, 642nd, 643rd, 644th, 645th, 646th, 647th, 648th, 649th, 650th, 651st, 652nd, 653rd, 654th, 655th, 656th, 657th, 658th, 659th, 660th, 661st, 662nd, 663rd, 664th, 665th, 666th, 667th, 668th, 669th, 670th, 671st, 672nd, 673rd, 674th, 675th, 676th, 677th, 678th, 679th, 680th, 681st, 682nd, 683rd, 684th, 685th, 686th, 687th, 688th, 689th, 690th, 691st, 692nd, 693rd, 694th, 695th, 696th, 697th, 698th, 699th, 700th, 701st, 702nd, 703rd, 704th, 705th, 706th, 707th, 708th, 709th, 710th, 711st, 712th, 713th, 714th, 715th, 716th, 717th, 718th, 719th, 720th, 721st, 722nd, 723rd, 724th, 725th, 726th, 727th, 728th, 729th, 730th, 731st, 732nd, 733rd, 734th, 735th, 736th, 737th, 738th, 739th, 740th, 741st, 742nd, 743rd, 744th, 745th, 746th, 747th, 748th, 749th, 750th, 751st, 752nd, 753rd, 754th, 755th, 756th, 757th, 758th, 759th, 760th, 761st, 762nd, 763rd, 764th, 765th, 766th, 767th, 768th, 769th, 770th, 771st, 772nd, 773rd, 774th, 775th, 776th, 777th, 778th, 779th, 780th, 781st, 782nd, 783rd, 784th, 785th, 786th, 787th, 788th, 789th, 790th, 791st, 792nd, 793rd, 794th, 795th, 796th, 797th, 798th, 799th, 800th, 801st, 802nd, 803rd, 804th, 805th, 806th, 807th, 808th, 809th, 810th, 811st, 812th, 813th, 814th, 815th, 816th, 817th, 818th, 819th, 820th, 821st, 822nd, 823rd, 824th, 825th, 826th, 827th, 828th, 829th, 830th, 831st, 832nd, 833rd, 834th, 835th, 836th, 837th, 838th, 839th, 840th, 841st, 842nd, 843rd, 844th, 845th, 846th, 847th, 848th, 849th, 850th, 851st, 852nd, 853rd, 854th, 855th, 856th, 857th, 858th, 859th, 860th, 861st, 862nd, 863rd, 864th, 865th, 866th, 867th, 868th, 869th, 870th, 871st, 872nd, 873rd, 874th, 875th, 876th, 877th, 878th, 879th, 880th, 881st, 882nd, 883rd, 884th, 885th, 886th, 887th, 888th, 889th, 890th, 891st, 892nd, 893rd, 894th, 895th, 896th, 897th, 898th, 899th, 900th, 901st, 902nd, 903rd, 904th, 905th, 906th, 907th, 908th, 909th, 910th, 911st, 912th, 913th, 914th, 915th, 916th, 917th, 918th, 919th, 920th, 921st, 922nd, 923rd, 924th, 925th, 926th, 927th, 928th, 929th, 930th, 931st, 932nd, 933rd, 934th, 935th, 936th, 937th, 938th, 939th, 940th, 941st, 942nd, 943rd, 944th, 945th, 946th, 947th, 948th, 949th, 950th, 951st, 952nd, 953rd, 954th, 955th, 956th, 957th, 958th, 959th, 960th, 961st, 962nd, 963rd, 964th, 965th, 966th, 967th, 968th, 969th, 970th, 971st, 972nd, 973rd, 974th, 975th, 976th, 977th, 978th, 979th, 980th, 981st, 982nd, 983rd, 984th, 985th, 986th, 987th, 988th, 989th, 990th, 991st, 992nd, 993rd, 994th, 995th, 996th, 997th, 998th, 999th, 1000th, 1001st, 1002nd, 1003rd, 1004th, 1005th, 1006th, 1007th, 1008th, 1009th, 1010th, 1011st, 1012th, 1013th, 1014th, 1015th, 1016th, 1017th, 1018th, 1019th, 1020th, 1021st, 1022nd, 1023rd, 1024th, 1025th, 1026th, 1027th, 1028th, 1029th, 1030th, 1031st, 1032nd, 1033rd, 1034th, 1035th, 1036th, 1037th, 1038th, 1039th, 1040th, 1041st, 1042nd, 1043rd, 1044th, 1045th, 1046th, 1047th, 1048th, 1049th, 1050th, 1051st, 1052nd, 1053rd, 1054th, 1055th, 1056th, 1057th, 1058th, 1059th, 1060th, 1061st, 1062nd, 1063rd, 1064th, 1065th, 1066th, 1067th, 1068th, 1069th, 1070th, 1071st, 1072nd, 1073rd, 1074th, 1075th, 1076th, 1077th, 1078th, 1079th, 1080th, 1081st, 1082nd, 1083rd, 1084th, 1085th, 1086th, 1087th, 1088th, 1089th, 1090th, 1091st, 1092nd, 1093rd, 1094th, 1095th, 1096th, 1097th, 1098th, 1099th, 1100th, 1101st, 1102nd, 1103rd, 1104th, 1105th, 1106th, 1107th, 1108th, 1109th, 1110th, 1111st, 1112th, 1113th, 1114th, 1115th, 1116th, 1117th, 1118th, 1119th, 1120th, 1121st, 1122nd, 1123rd, 1124th, 1125th, 1126th, 1127th, 1128th, 1129th, 1130th, 1131st, 1132nd, 1133rd, 1134th, 1135th, 1136th, 1137th, 1138th, 1139th, 1140th, 1141st, 1142nd, 1143rd, 1144th, 1145th, 1146th, 1147th, 1148th, 1149th, 1150th, 1151st, 1152nd, 1153rd, 1154th, 1155th, 1156th, 1157th, 1158th, 1159th, 1160th, 1161st, 1162nd, 1163rd, 1164th, 1165th, 1166th, 1167th, 1168th, 1169th, 1170th, 1171st, 1172nd, 1173rd, 1174th, 1175th, 1176th, 1177th, 1178th, 1179th, 1180th, 1181st, 1182nd, 1183rd, 1184th, 1185th, 1186th, 1187th, 1188th, 1189th, 1190th, 1191st, 1192nd, 1193rd, 1194th, 1195th, 1196th, 1197th, 1198th, 1199th, 1200th, 1201st, 1202nd, 1203rd, 1204th, 1205th, 1206th, 1207th, 1208th, 1209th, 1210th, 1211st, 1212nd, 1213th, 1214th, 1215th, 1216th, 1217th, 1218th, 1219th, 1220th, 1221st, 1222nd, 1223rd, 1224th, 1225th, 1226th, 1227th, 1228th, 1229th, 1230th, 1231st, 1232nd, 1233rd, 1234th, 1235th, 1236th, 1237th, 1238th, 1239th, 1240th, 1241st, 1242nd, 1243rd, 1244th, 1245th, 1246th, 1247th, 1248th, 1249th, 1250th, 1251st, 1252nd, 1253rd, 1254th, 1255th, 1256th, 1257th, 1258th, 1259th, 1260th, 1261st, 1262nd, 1263rd, 1264th, 1265th, 1266th, 1267th, 1268th, 1269th, 1270th, 1271st, 1272nd, 1273rd, 1274th, 1275th, 1276th, 1277th, 1278th, 1279th, 1280th, 1281st, 1282nd, 1283rd, 1284th, 1285th, 1286th, 1287th, 1288th, 1289th, 1290th, 1291st, 1292nd, 1293rd, 1294th, 1295th, 1296th, 1297th, 1298th, 1299th, 1300th, 1301st, 1302nd, 1303rd, 1304th, 1305th, 1306th, 1307th, 1308th, 1309th, 1310th, 1311st, 1312nd, 1313th, 1314th, 1315th, 1316th, 1317th, 1318th, 1319th, 1320th, 1321st, 1322nd, 1323rd, 1324th, 1325th, 1326th, 1327th, 1328th, 1329th, 1330th, 1331st, 1332nd, 1333rd, 1334th, 1335th, 1336th, 1337th, 1338th, 1339th, 1340th, 1341st, 1342nd, 1343rd, 1344th, 1345th, 1346th, 1347th, 1348th, 1349th, 1350th, 1351st, 1352nd, 1353rd, 1354th, 1355th, 1356th, 1357th, 1358th, 1359th, 1360th, 1361st, 1362nd, 1363rd, 1364th, 1365th, 1366th, 1367th, 1368th, 1369th, 1370th, 1371st, 1372nd, 1373rd, 1374th, 1375th, 1376th, 1377th, 1378th, 1379th, 1380th, 1381st, 1382nd, 1383rd, 1384th, 1385th, 1386th, 1387th, 1388th, 1389th, 1390th, 1391st, 1392nd, 1393rd, 1394th, 1395th, 1396th, 1397th, 1398th, 1399th, 1400th, 1401st, 1402nd, 1403rd, 1404th, 1405th, 1406th, 1407th, 1408th, 1409th, 1410th, 1411st, 1412nd, 1413th, 1414th, 1415th, 1416th, 1417th, 1418th, 1419th, 1420th, 1421st, 1422nd, 1423rd, 1424th, 1425th, 1426th, 1427th, 1428th, 1429th, 1430th, 1431st, 1432nd, 1433rd, 1434th, 1435th, 1436th, 1437th, 1438th, 1439th, 1440th, 1441st, 1442nd, 1443rd, 1444th, 1445th, 1446th, 1447th, 1448th, 1449th, 1450th, 1451st, 1452nd, 1453rd, 1454th, 1455th, 1456th, 1457th, 1458th, 1459th, 1460th, 1461st, 1462nd, 1463rd, 1464th, 1465th, 1466th, 1467th, 1468th, 1469th, 1470th, 1471st, 1472nd, 1473rd, 1474th, 1475th, 1476th, 1477th, 1478th, 1479th, 1480th, 1481st, 1482nd, 1483rd, 1484th, 1485th, 1486th, 1487th, 1488th, 1489th, 1490th, 1491st, 1492nd, 1493rd, 1494th, 1495th, 1496th, 1497th, 1498th, 1499th, 1500th, 1501st, 1502nd, 1503rd, 1504th, 1505th, 1506th, 1507th, 1508th, 1509th, 1510th, 1511st, 1512nd, 1513th, 1514th, 1515th, 1516th, 1517th, 1518th, 1519th, 1520th, 1521st, 1522nd, 1523rd, 1524th, 1525th, 1526th, 1527th, 1528th, 1529th, 1530th, 1531st, 1532nd, 1533rd, 1534th, 1535th, 1536th, 1537th, 1538th, 1539th, 1540th, 1541st, 1542nd, 1543rd, 1544th, 1545th, 1546th, 1547th, 1548th, 1549th, 1550th, 1551st, 1552nd, 1553rd, 1554th, 1555th, 1556th, 1557th, 1558th, 1559th, 1560th, 1561st, 1562nd, 1563rd, 1564th, 1565th, 1566th, 1567th, 1568th, 1569th, 1570th, 1571st, 1572nd, 1573rd, 1574th, 1575th, 1576th, 1577th, 1578th, 1579th, 1580th, 1581st, 1582nd, 1583rd, 1584th, 1585th, 1586th, 1587th, 1588th, 1589th, 1590th, 1591st, 1592nd, 1593rd, 1594th, 1595th, 1596th, 1597th, 1598th, 1599th, 1600th, 1601st, 1602nd, 1603rd, 1604th, 1605th, 1606th, 1607th, 1608th, 1609th, 1610th, 1611st, 1612nd, 1613th, 1614th, 1615th, 1616th, 1617th, 1618th, 1619th, 1620th, 1621st, 1622nd, 1623rd, 1624th, 1625th, 1626th, 1627th, 1628th, 1629th, 1630th, 1631st, 1632nd, 1633rd, 1634th, 1635th, 1636th, 1637th, 1638th, 1639th, 1640th, 1641st, 1642nd, 1643rd, 1644th, 1645th, 1646th, 1647th, 1648th, 1649th, 1650th, 1651st, 1652nd, 1653rd, 1654th, 1655th, 1656th, 1657th, 1658th, 1659th, 1660th, 1661st, 1662nd, 1663rd, 1664th, 1665th, 1666th, 1667th, 1668th, 1669th, 1670th, 1671st, 1672nd, 1673rd, 1674th, 1675th, 1676th, 1677th, 1678th, 1679th, 1680th, 1681st, 1682nd, 1683rd, 1684th, 1685th, 1686th, 1687th, 1688th, 1689th, 1690th, 1691st, 1692nd, 1693rd, 1694th, 1695th, 1696th, 1697th, 1698th, 1699th, 1700th, 1701st, 1702nd, 1703rd, 1704th, 1705th, 1706th, 1707th, 1708th, 1709th, 1710th, 1711st, 1712nd, 1713th, 1714th, 1715th, 1716th, 1717th, 1718th, 1719th, 1720th, 1721st, 1722nd, 1723rd, 1724th, 1725th, 1726th, 1727th, 1728th, 1729th, 1730th, 1731st, 1732nd, 1733rd, 1734th, 1735th, 1736th, 1737th, 1738th, 1739th, 1740th, 1741st, 1742nd, 1743rd, 1744th, 1745th, 1746th, 1747th, 1748th, 1749th, 1750th, 1751st, 1752nd, 1753rd, 1754th, 1755th, 1756th, 1757th, 1758th, 1759th, 1760th, 1761st, 1762nd, 1763rd, 1764th, 1765th, 1766th, 1767th, 1768th, 1769th, 1770th, 1771st, 1772nd, 1773rd, 1774th, 1775th, 1776th, 1777th, 1778th, 1779th, 1780th, 1781st, 1782nd, 1783rd, 1784th, 1785th, 1786th, 1787th, 1788th, 1789th, 1790th, 1791st, 1792nd, 1793rd, 1794th, 1795th, 1796th, 1797th, 1798th, 1799th, 1800th, 1801st, 1802nd, 1803rd, 1804th, 1805th, 1806th, 1807th, 1808th, 1809th, 1810th, 1811st, 1812nd, 1813th, 1814th, 1815th, 1816th, 1817th, 1818th, 1819th, 1820th, 1821st, 1822nd, 1823rd, 1824th, 1825th, 1826th, 1827th, 1828th, 1829th, 1830th, 1831



El Alamein Depression

dashing movement for him but he made one last attempt to outflank Eighth Army in the Battle of Alam el Halfa on 31 July 1942. By now General Montgomery had become Eighth Army commander and both sides, but particularly the British, were starting to build up their defences and resources. Though Rommel tried to outflank his enemy here, his relatively feeble forces were easily repulsed by much stronger British armoured brigades. During the Alam el Halfa action, 21st Panzer's commander, von Bismarck, was killed, Oberst C. H. Langerhausen took over temporary command until Generalmajor Heinz von Randow arrived on 18 September.

Now started the well documented El Alamein period, the beginning of the end for German ambitions in North Africa. The desert war became a war of heavy attrition that the Germans could not win thanks to the massive resources the British now enjoyed. Among these was the new M4 medium (Sherman) tank from the United States. Its turret mounted high-velocity 75mm gun made it superior to any tank the Germans then had in North Africa.

When the battle at Alamein took place, 21st Panzer was well in and next to the Italian Ariete Division. The disparity in numbers between the two sides was huge. When the British offensive began on 23 October 1942, Eighth Army had 1100

El Alamein

British tanks and 21st Panzer had about 50

British tanks and 21st Panzer had about 50

British tanks and 21st Panzer had about 50

British tanks and 21st Panzer had about 50

British tanks and 21st Panzer had about 50

British tanks and 21st Panzer had about 50





Page 41, 42

Opposite page above: Officers stand up in front of the machine gun, very dry, very open, and very cold, to show a definite position.

Opposite page below: After, if it is not a very large machine gun, it is a very small one. A very small machine gun, it is a very small one. A very small machine gun, it is a very small one. A very small machine gun, it is a very small one.

Below left: The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun.

Left: Knocked out the machine gun, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun.

Below left: One of the machine guns is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun. The machine gun is very small, it is a very small machine gun.





$\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{1}{2} \right) = \frac{1}{4}$



Rommel's. Not mainly in 1943. The tank regiment was designated 100th Panzer Regiment, made up from various independent companies that were equipped with captured French Hotchkiss and Somua tanks forming two battalions. The infantry regiment was 125th and 192nd Panzer Grenadier Regiments each having one battalion with halftracks and one with lorries. The armoured rifle regiment was all self-propelled, the 1st Battalion having two batteries equipped with the 105mm Wespe and one battery with the 150mm Hummel, and Battalion had three batteries equipped with the Wespe, and 3rd Battalion had three batteries of 150mm Hummels. Also of note was 230th St. Ingelgeschütz Battalion equipped with a self battery of four Nebelwerfer rocket launchers and four companies with eight 88mm howitzers and 75mm Pak 40 towed guns. The 305th Army Panz Battalion had three companies of four 88mm and two 20mm guns arm mounted on half tracks. With comprehensive support companies including 220th Panzer Pioneer Battalion with halftracks (as a bridging column) the division was well equipped and hard punching for its size was on the whole. The official listings for the division show that the old French tanks were supposed to be replaced by three companies per battalion each with 22 PzKpfw IIIs and one company with 22 PzKpfw IVs. This does not seem to have been done, however, for it was not until the invasion scare really set in that on 20 May 1944 the 1st Battalion was told to re equip with 17 PzKpfw IVs per company and the 2nd Battalion with 14 PzKpfw IVs per company, all in place of the old French tanks.

As in North Africa, 21st Panzer Division was not long out of the limelight. For a while it was to come once again under command of Erwin Rommel, now a Generalfeldmarschal. With the Allied Second Front expected soon, Rommel was asked by Hitler to carry out a detailed tour of the Atlantic Wall coastal defences—from Denmark to the Spanish border—to check their efficacy. This he did in November and December 1943, and found plenty to put right for there were critical weaknesses. This led to his appointment in late January 1944 as Commander in Chief of the German armies from the Netherlands to the Loire.

Rommel believed that if the landing took place, the invaders needed to be pushed back into the sea quickly before they could get a foothold. Rommel's plans called for well-equipped armoured divisions all along the coast to do this. But because the coast was long and manpower was tight, the divisions had to be stretched out covering a big area each. Mobile divisions further in and were supposed to come up in support as required. As fate would have it, when D-Day came on 6 June 1944, it took place in 21st Panzer's area. The division had been based by Rommel near Caen, and it had to cover the entire coastal area where the landings took place. The problem was that Rommel was away from the area



These were the German soldiers who fought the Battle of Normandy. The soldier in the foreground is a member of the 21st Panzer Division.

Opposite page: A German soldier in a tank during the Battle of Normandy.

He was killed during the Battle of Normandy.

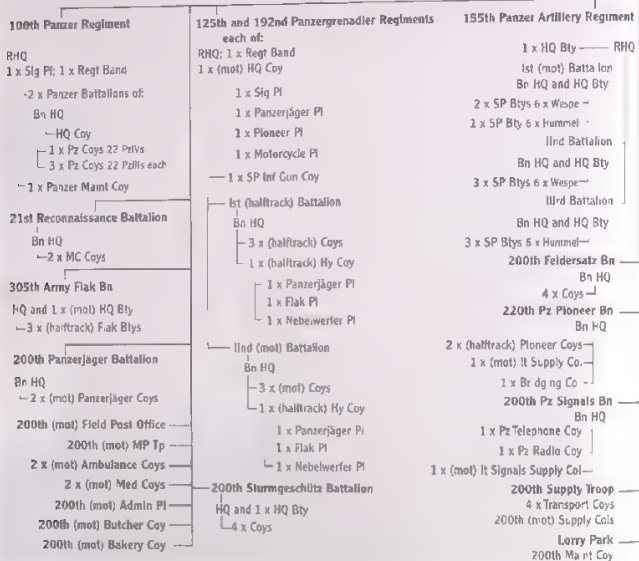
Below: A German soldier in a tank during the Battle of Normandy.



21ST PANZER DIVISION as officially constituted July 1943

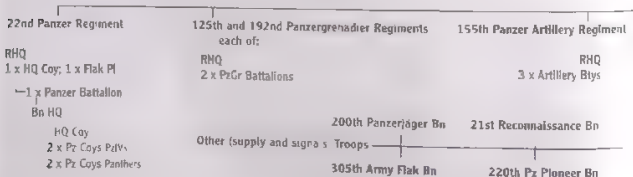
Div -lon HQ

Divisional Staff; 200th (mot) Mapping Det



21ST PANZER DIVISION on the Eastern Front early 1945

Division HQ



21ST PANZER DIVISION as at 1 March 1944

D vis on HQ

Divisional Staff 200th (mot) Mapping Det.
Divisional Band

100th Panzer Regiment

RHQ

1 x Sig Pl 1 x Staff Pz Pl 3 tanks

Panzer Battalion I

Bn HQ

Staff Coy 2 x Pz ss 5 PzVls

1 x SP Flak Coy

4 x Pz Coys 17 PzVls each

Panzer Battalion II

Bn HQ

Staff Coy 7 tanks

2 x Coys 18 Somuas

1 x Coy 10 Hatchk ss, 6 Somuas

1 x Coy 7 PzVl

1 x Panzer Maint Coy

200th Pz Recce Battalion

1st (halftrack) Coy 16 Sd Kfz 250s

2nd Armoured Car Coy

1 x AC Pl 6 Sd Kfz 234/2s

(75mm gun)

1 x AC Det 8 Sd Kfz 234/1s

16 Sd Kfz 224s

3rd (halftrack) Coy 2 Sd Kfz 250/3s

28 Sd Kfz 250/1s, 2 Sd Kfz 250/2s

80mm mortar, 2 Sd Kfz 251/10s

57mm guns

4th (halftrack) Coy 2 Sd Kfz 250/3s

28 Sd Kfz 250/1s, 2 Sd Kfz 250/2s

80mm mortar, 5 Sd Kfz 251/10s

57mm guns

5th (halftrack) Coy 27 Sd Kfz 251s

2 x Fla antiair, 2 x 75mm guns

3 x Pak 40s, 1 x 37mm gun

305th Army Flak Bn

1 x (mot) Staff Bty

2 x (halftrack) Flak Btys 4 x 88mm, 3 x 20mm

1 x (halftrack) Flak Bty 9 x 37mm 2 x quad 20mm

1 x Searchlight Batteries

125th Panzergrenadier Regiment

RHQ

1 x (mot) Staff Coy

1 x Sig Pl

1 x Panzerjäger Pl

1 x Pioneer Pl

1 x Motorcycle Pl

1 x (mot, Heavy Coy

9th SP Inf Gun Coy

10th Halftrack Nebewerfer Coy

1st (halftrack) Battalion

Bn HQ

3 x (halftrack) Coys

1 x (halftrack) Hy Coy

1 x Panzerjäger Pl

1 x Flak Pl

1 x Panzerzerstörer Sect

Ind (mot) Battal on

Bn HQ

3 x (mot) Coys

1 x (halftrack) Hy Coy

1 x Panzerjäger Pl

1 x Flak Pl

1 x Panzerzerstörer Sect

200th Sturmgeschütz Battalion

1 x Staff Bty 1 StuG

4 x Coys each 8 StuG IIIIs (105mm guns)

4 x StuG (75mm Pak 40)

200th Panzerjäger Battalion

Bn HQ

2 x (mot) Panzerjäger Coys

(12 x 88mm Pak 43s)

155th Panzer Artillery Regiment

1 Staff Bty RHQ

1st (mot) Battalion on

Bn HQ and Staff Bty

2 x (mot) Btys 4 x 122mm hows

1 x (mot) Bty 4 x 100mm K18s

Ind Battalion

Bn HQ and Staff Bty

2 x SP Btys 6 x Wespe

1 x SP Bty 6 x Humme

Ind Battalion

Bn HQ and Staff Bty

2 x SP Btys 6 x Wespe

1 x SP Bty 6 x Hummel

200th Feldersatz Bn

Bn HQ

4 x Coys

220th Pz Pioneer Bn

Bn HQ

2 x (halftrack) Pioneer Coys

1 x (mot) Panzerzerstörer Coy

1 x Bridging Col

200th Pz Signals Bn

Bn HQ

1 x Pz Telephone Coy

1 x Pz Radio Coy

1 x (mot) Lt Signa Supply Co

200th Supply Troop

8 x Transport Coys,

Lorry Park

2 x Maint Coys, 1 x Hy Maint Supply Col

200th (mot) Field Post Office

200th (mot) MP Tp

1/, 2/200th (mot) Ambulance Coys

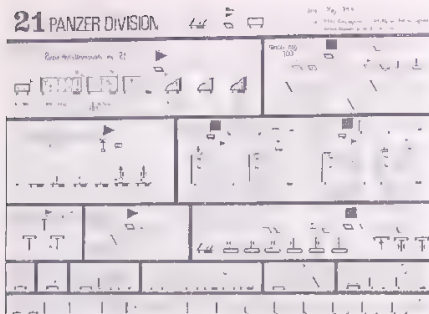
1/, 2/200th (mot) Med Coys

200th (mot) Admin Pl

200th (mot) Butcher Coy

200th (mot) Bakery Coy

21 PANZER DIVISION



Another German document showing the order of battle of the 21st Panzer Division at Caen, 14 June 1944, when it was in the Normandy front.

These figures are of interest, especially 200 tanks, which is a very high number for a Panzer division at that time. The 21st Panzer Division was also the only Panzer division to be equipped with a heavy tank, the Tiger I, in the Normandy front. The Tiger I was a very powerful tank, and it was a great asset to the 21st Panzer Division.

From a military standpoint, the 21st Panzer Division was one of the most powerful divisions in the German army at that time. It was equipped with a large number of tanks, and it was a very well-trained division. The 21st Panzer Division was also the only Panzer division to be equipped with a heavy tank, the Tiger I, in the Normandy front.

on the day of the invasion. The SS divisions which should have come up to assist were under Hitler's control, and nobody could get them released.

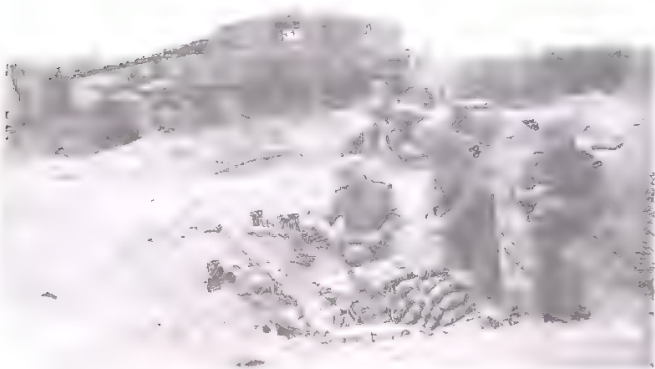
So for the first day of the Normandy landing 21st Panzer was operating alone. Muddled thinking by the area commanders delayed 21st Panzer's early entry into the fray, but the divisional commander himself ordered a 06.30hrs attack on the British paratroops who had landed at Ranville. They gave the Paras a tough time until withdrawn at 10.30hrs with orders to counter attack the British advance at Caen. They did well at this and for a time that evening they managed to reach the coast at Lion-sur-Mer and drive a wedge between the adjacent 3rd British and 3rd Canadian Divisions. But Allied

air power and sheer numbers of opponents seriously restricted 21st Panzer activities. Notably, however, with 12th SS-Panzer Division, they blocked the scheduled early push inland to Villers Bocage and Evrecy which stretched the 1st (BR) Corps considerably.

Rommel was back in charge on 9 June and he planned a counter-attack against both the British and American sectors. 21st Panzer was grouped with two SS divisions under Sepp Dietrich, and intended to push northwest to take Bayeux. This bold plan came to nothing when corps headquarters and all the draughting were blown away by Allied bombing. The division's final fling in Normandy was put up a spirited resistance that gave the Guards Armoured Division a hard time and slowed their advance by a day during Operation 'Bluecoat' on 1 August 1944. After this, the battered survivors of 21st Panzer were largely destroyed in the Falaise Pocket during August 1944, but by this time it had merged with the Luftwaffe Field Division. The same commander and staff reformed the division in Lorraine in September 1944 by expanding 112th Panzer Brigade. At this time the tank component, 100th Panzer Regiment, may have been equipped with 10 companies of 17 Panther tanks and two of PzKpfw IVs. The much reduced division took part in the withdrawals through France and Germany, and fought in Epinal, Nancy, Metz and the Saar area. It ended up in Kaiserlautern.

Generalmajor Feuchtinger the originally appointed commander was temporarily replaced from January 15 until March 8 1944 by Generalmajor Ossig Groig and he in turn was succeeded by Generalmajor Franz Westhoven until 15 May 1944, when Feuchtinger, now a Generalleutnant again took command.

On 25 January 1945 the division was reformed as a 1944 type Panzer Division (reduced). The commander was Oberst Helmut Zoltenkopf. In this form the division contained a single combined battalion based on 22nd Panzer Regiment had a staff company, Flak platoon, two companies with Panther tanks and 10 companies with PzKpfw IV tanks. The last recorded issue of tanks was 9 February 1945 when the division was directed to the defence of East Germany. It carried out defensive operations at Goerlitz, Slatisk, Cottbus and other areas surrendered to the Soviet Army on 29 April 1945.



INSIGNIA & MARKINGS

Below: Excesses use was made of motorcycles and not merely for the officers in *SS*. The causal sign of the soldier in this case was it being up to a road or the front.

Right: A *Sturmgeschütz* of the 5th *Panzer* Division. It is not the original *Panzer* grey, but a darker grey. The *Sturmgeschütz* of the 5th *Panzer* Division in the front of the *Sturmgeschütz* 5th *Panzer* Division, which was not

COLOURS

The vehicles that first went to Libya in February–March 1941 and indeed most of the later replacement and reinforcement supplies were all in the colours applied for Europe. In essence this was an overall ‘Panzer grey’ for tanks (a dark grey with a bluish tinge) and field grey (a greenish grey) on other vehicles. Some of the tanks were also in field grey, particularly those shipped later. Because 5th *SS* went into immediate deployment, most vehicles in the early weeks of the Cyrenaica campaign were still in the dark grey or field grey colours.

To provide a better camouflage for desert conditions a dark yellow (*Dunkelgelb*) was supplied, and this was applied over the dark original colours.







Above: The MG emblem

Sometimes this was done neatly overall, but frequently it was only roughly applied reflecting the pace of the campaign. Thus some vehicles could be seen part dark, part yellow, and often only upper surfaces were painted, leaving chassis, etc. still grey. Tactical signs were often painted roughly round, leaving them on a patch of the original dark colour. The sand yellow colour was sometimes referred to as ochre, and in the strong summer sun it often faded to a very pale yellow or stone shade. To give extra camouflage, a dark earth paste was supplied which could be thinned with water and applied with brush or spray gun in mottled or rough wavy effects, but there were no hard rules on this, so there was great variation.

When 21st Panzer Division was in Normandy in the summer of 1944, pictorial evidence suggests they stuck firmly to rules issued for vehicle painting by Rommel's HQ, confirmed by postwar interrogation of his staff. In 1943 the Germans adopted a basic sand yellow for all tanks, and all units were issued with brown and green water-thinned paste to apply camouflage to suit the terrain. This was done universally in Europe, but the mighty Allied air superiority evident at the time of the Normandy invasion caused an overall dark earth to be ordered for tanks and vehicles in that theatre, and the brown and green camouflage colours could be applied over that. This gave much better concealment in the Normandy bocage country against marauding Allied Typhoons and P-47s seeking out tanks for rocket attack.

DAK MARKING

Universally applied, usually front and rear to the left side, but also sometimes showing to the sides, was the Deutsches Afrika Korps symbol: a stylised palm tree with a swastika superimposed. It was often shown in white only, but officially it was applied in white for 5th Light/21st Panzer, green for corps troops, and red for 15th Panzer Division. However pictures show that the latter also sometimes used white for the symbol.

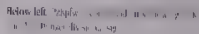
DIVISIONAL MARKINGS

No divisional sign was ever authorised for 5th Light Division, but many of their early vehicles were allocated from 3rd Panzer Division and the divisional sign on these vehicles was retained, sometimes for months. This sign was an inverted Y with two vertical strokes to the right and the sign was usually painted in yellow, sometimes white.

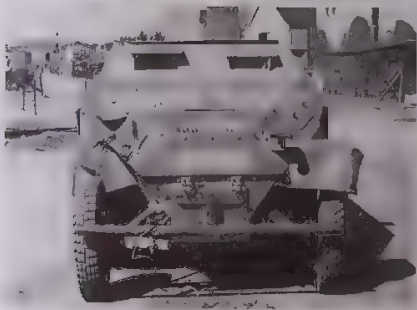
When 5th Light became 21st Panzer a runic symbol was authorised. Described as a capital D with a horizontal bar in the centre, it could be seen applied in either rounded or elongated form, and was normally white. It was normally displayed on vehicles close to the DAK symbol, but it could also be seen on temporary roadside directional signs.

TACTICAL SIGNS

German Panzer troops had evolved an effective system before the war using call signs whereby a tank's, armoured car's, or armoured half-track's place in a unit could easily be identified, and unit commanders directing movement could instantly call up any vehicle by its tactical number. A three-digit number was used with the first digit indicating company, second digit the platoon (*Zug*), and the third digit the individual vehicle. Before the war, on tanks, this number was usually

[illegible]

Boomer left the trackshouse at 10:00 a.m. on 10/28/04 and Arika keeps track of $\eta_{\text{Boomer}} = 0.1 \pm 0.001$ m/s.



Right: This Sd Kfz 251/6 half-track command vehicle displays the formation sign of 21st Panzer Division and is seen in the second artillery battery area. It is also the command half-track for the 21st Panzer Division's command company.

Below: The Sd Kfz 251/6, is an air reconnaissance vehicle and is the command supply column. It is also the command half-track for the 21st Panzer Division's command company. The vehicle is seen in the formation sign of the 21st Panzer Division's command company. The vehicle is seen in the formation sign of the 21st Panzer Division's command company.

Opposite: above right: The Sd Kfz 251/6 is an air reconnaissance vehicle and is the command supply column. It is also the command half-track for the 21st Panzer Division's command company.

Opposite: below left: The Panzer grey colour is seen on this PzKpfw III of 1st Panzer Regiment, as it is seen in the formation sign of the 21st Panzer Division's command company. The vehicle is seen in the formation sign of the 21st Panzer Division's command company.

Opposite: below right: The crew of an MG34 on a Sd Kfz 251/6 is seen in the formation sign of the 21st Panzer Division's command company. The vehicle is seen in the formation sign of the 21st Panzer Division's command company.





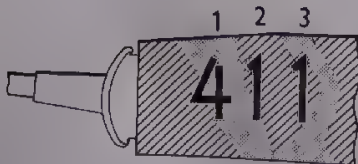


R

I

II

1234567890



painted in small digits on a rhomboid metal plate (the rhomboid was the tactical symbol for a tank—see below) and this was affixed on superstructure or turret side and could be moved from vehicle to vehicle if desired. In the early part of the Cyrenaica campaign, some of the old tanks issued to 5th Panzer Regiment still carried this style of prewar marking.

However, most had the new style adopted when the war started. The same sort of three-digit numbering was used, but the numbers were now painted large on the turret or superstructure sides. These could be in plain white or yellow but were often red (or some other colour) outlined in white. Many tanks in 5th Panzer Regiment carried this style with the red number outlined in white.

Headquarters vehicles had a variation of this battalion (*Abteilung*) numbering system. Regimental command tanks had a prefix R in front of a two-digit number in the style

R01	Regt commander
R02	Regt adjutant
R03	Regt ordnance or signal officer
R04-R08	other Regt officers

The medical officer's tank (when allocated) often had the medical serpent painted behind or interwoven with the number.

Battalion HQ tanks used the same system but with the Roman numeral I replacing the 1 for 1st Battalion staff vehicles, and the Roman numeral II as the prefix for 2nd Battalion staff vehicles. If there was a 3rd Battalion, the Roman numeral III was used. Thus 'I01 indicated the battalion commander's tank of the first battalion and so on.

Companies were numbered through the regiment so the first company of the 2nd Battalion had 5 as the first digit (assuming four companies in the 1st Battalion). In this system the company commander took digits 01, so the company commander of 1st Company in the 2nd Battalion had 501 in his tank. The company sergeant major had 502, hence 503, and any other company's tank would take 503, 504, etc. First tank of the first platoon would be 511, and so on.



TACTICAL SYMBOLS

The German army had a complex but logical system of small symbols indicating every type of unit in what amounted to pictogram form. These symbols could be used on maps, organisational charts and even on directional signs if needed. They were also painted front and rear on vehicles. There were symbols for tank units (the rhomboid), wheeled artillery, reconnaissance units, SP artillery, supply columns, and so on. In the desert, at least, this method of marking tactical symbols was not applied thoroughly, and many vehicles carried no tactical symbols, indicating perhaps the fluid nature of both the fighting and the organisation which often led to the creation of ad hoc units. Some tactical symbols, such as those of divisional commanders, were painted on metal plates and were displayed on vehicles and in locations when appropriate.

Opposite page, top: The 5th Panzer Regiment's Panzer III's tactical number is painted in the previous style on a metal plate next to the national marking. No vehicle markings, as still in Panzer grey.

Opposite page, centre: Lettering for regimental and battalion staff identification is universal.

Opposite page, below: A light identification system shows a knocked-out Polish II-catch British Dodge scout car alongside carries the Kollidollage, a regimental advance.

Below: Another example of the use of the national flag for recognition purposes, this time over the front and rear of a VW KdFswagen. One of the soldiers carries a Thompson sub-machine gun.

NATIONAL INSIGNIA

When the war started a plain white (sometimes yellow) Balkan cross was applied to vehicles used in the Polish campaign. For the French campaign of 1940 this was modified to a white outline on the dark grey base colour. Vehicles sent to Libya early in 1940 carried these earlier markings. For example, Rommel's map caravan (see photograph on page 22) still had the plain white cross of the Polish campaign. Against the dark sand colour the white cross did not show up sufficiently so the centre was painted in black in a similar style to the cross on Luftwaffe aircraft. However, DAK made extensive use of captured British vehicles and to distinguish these for their own troops they applied oversized versions on sides and sometimes tops. In a few cases a big white or black swastika sign was applied instead. For normal air recognition the DAK used the national flag tied over engine covers or turret tops as a very good temporary sign when needed in the presence of Luftwaffe aircraft.



Rechtliche Gesichtspunkte des Patentwesens

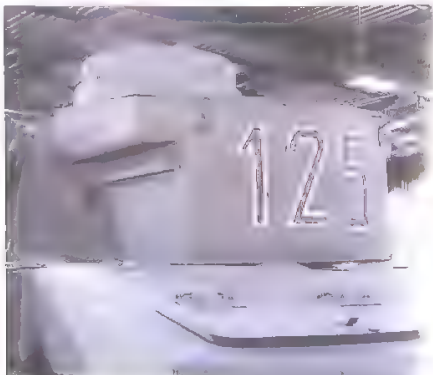
He was right to point out that a... of...
as... would...
b... ..

Not on sight was the new 9000 2400. It was
all set for launch. Most of them are in the
cabin of the 9000 2400. It is now in the
on the page. Courtesy of the press.

Opposite page 446, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872,

At some point he will be able to do it, but it will take a long time.

Opposite page below right: A photograph of a
photographer and a group of people in a field.
A group of people in a field, some standing and some
sitting, looking towards the camera.









...the ...
...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...

...
...
...

...
...
...
...

PEOPLE

ROMMEL

Erwin Rommel was born in Heidenheim, Württemberg, on 17 November 1891. He joined the army in March 1910, and that July entered the 124th Württemberg Infantry Regiment. Promotion came quickly and in 1911 he went to officer candidate school—the *Kriegsschule* Danzig. Lieutenant Rommel came back to his regiment in 1912.

At the start of World War I he was a platoon commander and saw his first action in August–September 1914 at Bleid, in the Meuse Valley. He was wounded during hand to hand fighting and was subsequently awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Hospitalised, he went back to the front at Argonne where on 29 January 1915 he was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class, for his part in a counter-attack and in June he was wounded again. He was promoted Oberleutnant and company commander in September of the same year.

In November 1916 he married Lucie Maria Möller in Danzig and transferred that same month to the Württemberg Mountain Battalion. He finished his service on the Western Front at Helsen Ridge and then transferred to the Eastern Front in Romania where he fought at Gagesti and Mount Cosna—and then the Italian Front

where he fought on Monte Majo. He won the Pour le Merite in December 1917, returning to the Western Front where he ended the war as *Hauptmann* (captain) and a staff officer.

At the end of the war he returned to Württemberg. He survived the demobilisation of German armed forces by ending up commanding an Inter-Allied security company, No 32 IS Compagnie, Friedrichshafen, where he demobilised a hostile unit. Appointed to command a company of Reconnaissance Infantry Regiment 13 based in Stuttgart in January 1921, he spent the next eight years with the regiment before becoming an instructor, at the Dresden Cavalry School. During this time his son Manfred was born.

Below: Rommel directs a tank battle. The picture is a personal shot by 250th tank regiment of the 1st SS Division, showing a tank with a soldier on top directing a tank support.



In April 1932 he was promoted *Major* and two years later during 1934 he met Hitler for the first time when his company formed an honour guard at a rally. This proximity to the Führer would see Rommel fall under the spell of the Nazi leader and Rommel would be attached to Hitler's military escort for a party rally at Nuremberg in 1936 and command the *Führerbegleitbataillon* (escort battalion) at Hitler's field HQ during the occupation of the Sudetenland in 1938. During the 1930s Rommel also did a three year tour of duty as an instructor at Potsdam Infantry School and in 1937 his book *Infanterie greift an* ('Infantry attacks') was published.

He was promoted *Oberst* (colonel) in 1938 and became commandant of the Werner Neustadt Kriegsschule from November 1938 to August 1939. Twice during this period he was called on to command Hitler's field HQ. When the invasion of



Right: Rommel discusses troop deployment at the German-Italian border in 1940.

Left: The Desert Fox makes a desert cup of tea.

Poland began he was once more given this duty with promotion to *Generalmajor*. Following Hitler's successful campaign, he decided he wanted an operational command and thanks to Hitler's intervention, was able to plump for a tank unit rather than a mountain division.

On 6 February 1940 Rommel took charge of 7th Panzer Division—the Ghost Division—on the Western Front. He handled the unit brilliantly covering himself with personal glory. On 15 May 1940 he was awarded the Clasp to the Iron Cross, and on 26 May the Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross. He exploited the tenets of Blitzkrieg and the mobility of his armoured units to the cost of the French and British forces ranged against him. 7th Panzer captured nearly 100,000 prisoners with losses of only 682 killed. Little did he know when the armistice was signed with France, what awaited him on the shores of the Mediterranean.

In January 1941 Rommel was promoted *Generalleutnant* and in February he became Commander-in-Chief of German Troops in Libya, personally selected for the job by Hitler. His desert war has become legendary. Always short of men and equipment, frequently without sufficient air support, he would take the DAK almost to the Pyramids before being thrown back. On 21 January 1942 he was awarded Swords to the Oakleaves of the Knight's Cross. After the capture of Tobruk in 1942 he was promoted *Generalfeldmarschall*. It was the apogee of his success. While recovering from sickness in Germany in autumn 1942, the Battle of America began and he was recalled to Africa where he presided over the long retreat back through Libya. In March 1943 Hitler presented him the Diamonds to his Iron Cross, making the sixth winner of this coveted award. He left Africa in summer 1943 becoming Commander-in-Chief Army Group B, Italy. In November 1943, Rommel left Italy taking on special responsibilities for inspecting the defences on Northwest Europe. This he did and, subsequently, on 15 January 1944 Rommel's Army Group B took over control of the Atlantic and Channel coasts. Rommel did not have much time to improve the defences of the Atlantic Wall. On 6 June 1944 the invasion of Normandy took place and on 17 July, in the middle of the Battle of Normandy, Rommel was severely wounded when his car was strafed on his way to his HQ, La Roche Guyon. He was first hospitalised and then took sick leave. During 1944 he was implicated in the bomb plot against Hitler and forced to commit suicide. He received a state funeral on 18 October 1944.

Commanders of 21st Panzer Division

Name	CO From	To	Comments
Generalmajor Johannes Streich	20/2/41	22/7/41	Dismissed by Rommel
Generalmajor Johann von Ravenstein	23/7/41	29/11/41	Captured by Commonwealth forces
Oberstleutnant Gustav Georg Knabe	29/11/41	30/11/41	Retired due to ill health
Generalleutnant Karl Bottcher	30/11/41	30/1/42	Retired due to ill health
Generalmajor Georg von Bismarck	30/1/42	31/8/42	Killed in action
Oberst Carl Hans Lungenhausen	31/8/42	18/9/42	Temporary commander
Generalmajor Heinz von Randow	18/9/42	21/12/42	Killed in action
Oberst Hans Georg Hilderbrandt	1/1/43	25/4/43	Retired due to ill health
Generalmajor Heinrich Hermann von Hulsen	25/4/43	13/5/43	Surrendered with DAK in Tunisia
Generalleutnant Edgar Feuchtmeyer	15/7/43	25/1/45	Commanded reformed division in Normandy
Generalmajor Oswin Grolig	15/1/44	8/3/44	Temporary replacement
Generalmajor Franz Westhoven	8/3/44	8/5/44	Temporary replacement
Oberst Helmut Zollenkopf	25/1/45	29/4/45	Surrendered to Russians

Rommel was a brilliant tactician, a courageous soldier and an inspiring leader of men. Respected by his foes as much as his friends, his desert campaigns showed him to be a consummate general with the knack of being in the right place at the right time and the skill to make the right decisions when under extreme pressure.

GENERALMAJOR JOHANNES STREICH

Born 16 April 1891 at Augustenburg, East Prussia. Streich joined up in 1911 and fought throughout WW1, reaching the rank of *Leutnant* commanding a company and winning the Iron Cross First and Second Class. Postwar he served in an MT company, then played an important part in the development of the PzKpfw I–V as a technical adviser in the Army Ordnance Office. In 1937 he took command of Panzer Regiment 15, promoted to *Oberst* in April 1938. He fell out with Rommel on two occasions, first in France in 1940 in the rush to the coast and later in Africa during the siege of Tobruk, where he was relieved of his command. Rommel criticised him, saying that he was far too concerned with the well being of his troops, to which Streich replied: 'I can think of no greater words of praise for a divisional commander.' He was awarded the Knight's Cross for his bravery in France.

His regiment had smashed through a blocking position at La Basse, taking 20 000 prisoners and reaching the Atlantic coast. He was promoted to *Generalmajor* and given command of 5th Light Division before being sent to North Africa.

GENERALMAJOR JOHANN VON RAVENSTEIN

A careerist, aristocratic and good looking, Johann von Ravenstein was born in 1889 in Strehlen, Silesia. He joined the army in 1909 and was commissioned as a *Leutnant* into the 7th Grenadier Regiment. He served in WW1 and was wounded several times in four years on the Western Front. He was awarded Germany's highest decoration, the *Pour le Mérite*, on 25 June 1918 for conspicuous bravery during the Battle of the Marne. He left the army at the end of the war, but rejoined in



Left: Von Ravenstein after his capture by the Allies. Zein is shown with his escort officer.

1934 as CO 2nd Battalion 60th Infantry Regiment, which later became 4th Cavalry Rifle Regiment and which he led into action in 1940. He was then promoted to *Generalmajor* and on 20 May 1941 assigned command of 21st Panzer Regiment taking it to North Africa. He took over command of 21st Panzer Division when Rommel dismissed Streich, holding the position for six months. He was captured by New Zealanders on 29 November 1941 while on his way to DAK HQ during the Crusader battles, when he mistakenly drove into their positions.

OBERSTLEUTNANT GUSTAV-GEORG KNABE

Born 8 July 1897 at Wichmannsdorf near Templin, Gustav-Georg Knabe left school at 17 in order to volunteer for war service, joining the 8th Brandenburg Infantry Regiment. He saw action on the Western Front and was promoted up through the ranks to end the war as *Leutnant*. After WWI he remained in the *Reichswehr* spending a time at *Kriegsschule* before serving with 1st Panzer Division. Promoted *Major* after a spell of sickness he joined 66th Infantry Regiment. He saw action on the Western Front in 1940 as CO 2nd Battalion, 93rd Motorised Infantry Regiment before being sent to Africa with the 15th Motorcycle Battalion. By now *Oberstleutnant* he was in the advanced elements of this unit when he took battle at Sollum and Capuzzo for which he was awarded the Knight's Cross. He then commanded 104th Panzergranadier Regiment until given charge of 21st Panzer Division in November 1941. His tenure was only nominal, for immediately ill health forced his return to Germany. Following his recovery, he was promoted to *Obers* and served with Panzergruppe West. After a severe car accident while serving as training and staff officer with Romanian forces he was invalided out of the army.

GENERALLEUTNANT KARI BÖTTCHER

Rommel's artillery commander Böttcher was born in Thorn, East Prussia in 1899. He joined the army as an officer candidate in March 1909 becoming a *Leutnant* in the 5th Foot Artillery Regiment. He served in WWI. The interwar *Reichswehr* began WW2 as commander of the 1st Artillery Regiment. Promoted to *Generalmajor* in March 1940 in November 1941 he was appointed CO of 21st Panzer Division when Knabe went home ill. He was awarded the Knight's Cross in December 1941 for preventing far superior enemy forces from breaking through to relieve Tobruk. After two months in charge of the division he, too fell ill and was evacuated to Germany where he was promoted to *Generalleutnant* on 1 May 1942. He subsequently served on the OKH reserve and commanded various infantry and artillery divisions.

GENERALMAJOR GEORG VON BISMARCK

Born in Neumühl, near Kustrin in 1891, Georg von Bismarck joined the army in 1911 as a young officer in the 6th Light Infantry Battalion. He served through WWI winning the Royal House Order of Hohenzollern with Swords for bravery. In 1939–40 he commanded 7th Rifle Regiment in Poland and France, where he was awarded the Knight's Cross for his part in 7th Panzer Division's meteoric push to the Atlantic coast. On 5 January 1942 he was posted to Africa where Rommel



in command of 21st Panzer Division. He then led it in a sustained advance from Cyrenaica to El Alamein. On 1 August 1942 he was promoted to *Generalleutnant*. He was killed in a mortar attack while crossing the minefields at Alam Halfa at the end of that same month.

Above: Recaptured gun from 88th anti-air

OBERST CARL HANS LUNGERHAUSEN

Born on 20 July 1896 at Darmstadt, Lungerhausen joined the army in August 1914, as a *Leutnant* in the Dragoons. Postwar he commanded 1st Battalion of 8th Cavalry Regiment in the *Reichswehr*. He was promoted to *Oberst* in February 1939 and later commanded the 164th *Leichte Division* in Africa from August till late November 1942. From 31 August to 18 September of the same year he temporarily filled in as commander of 21st Panzer Division following Bismarck's death. He was promoted *Generalleutnant* on 1 January 1943, and served later in Sardinia and Italy, being awarded the German Cross in Gold.

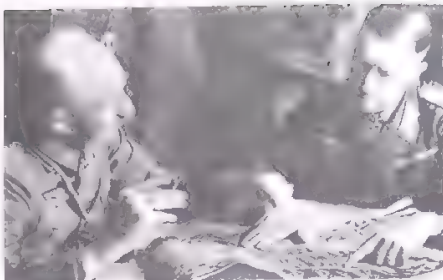
GENERALMAJOR HEINZ VON RANDOW

Born on 15 November 1890 at Gramkau, von Randow joined the army on 18 June 1910 as a *Leutnant* in the 18th Dragoon Regiment. He was a cavalryman who witnessed the transfer of the unit to tanks. Postwar he served in the *Reichswehr*, commanding Cavalry Regiment 13. He was promoted *Oberst* on 1 February 1939. He commanded 21st Panzer Division from 18 September 1942 until 21 December 1942, when he was killed near Tripoli during the DAK withdrawal, a few days after being promoted *Generalleutnant*. He was the holder of the German Cross in Gold.

OBERST HANS GEORG HILDERBRANDT

Born on 15 June 1896 at Fraustadt, Hilderbrandt joined the army in August 1914 as *Leutnant* in the 36th Fusilier Regiment. Following the end of WWI he remained in the *Reichswehr*. He was promoted *Oberst* in November 1940, finally reaching

Right: Generaloberst von Arnim (left) the last commander of German forces in Tunisia is greeted by the last commander of 21st Panzer Division in North Africa, Generalmajor Edgar Feuchtinger, von Hülse, 1943



the rank of *Generalleutnant* on 1 June 1944. He commanded 21st Panzer Division from 1 January 1943 to 15 March 1943 when he fell ill. After a most a year of sick leave, he then commanded 715th Infantry Division. He was the holder of the German Cross in Gold.

GENERALMAJOR HEINRICH-HERMANN VON HÜLSEN

Born on 8 July 1895 in Weimar, Hülse joined the army on 28 April 1914 as a *Leutnant* in the Fusiliers. Following the end of WWI he, too, remained in the *Reichswehr*, commanding Cavalry Regiment 11. He was promoted *Oberst* in December 1940, and *Generalmajor* in May 1943. Having commanded Schützenbrigade 9, he was then a staff officer with Panzerarmee Afrika before commanding 21st Panzer Division. He surrendered with the division to the Allies and was taken prisoner on 12 May 1943.

GENERALMAJOR EDGAR FEUCHTINGER

Edgar Feuchtinger was born in Metz on 9 November 1894 and joined the army on 7 August 1914. He was originally an artilleryman, serving in both WWI and afterwards in the *Reichswehr*, being promoted to *Oberstleutnant* in 1938. He was a strong Nazi sympathiser who had helped organise the annual rallies at Nuremberg. He became an *Oberst* in 1941 and *Generalmajor* in 1943, commanding 21st Panzer Division when it was reformed in Normandy with two short breaks during which it was commanded first by Generalmajor Oswin Grolig and then by Generalmajor Franz Westhoven. Feuchtinger was awarded the German Cross in Gold and in August 1944 he was promoted *Generalleutnant*.

OBERST HELMUT ZOLLENKOPF

Taking command of the unit in spring 1945, Zollenkopf's 21st Panzer Division consisted of a single combined battalion based on 22nd Panzer Regiment. Directed to the defence of East Germany, Zollenkopf surrendered the division to the Soviet Army on 29 April 1945.

ASSESSMENT

The story of 21st Panzer Division particularly in the 1941 period when it formed the bulk of Rommel's very much understrength DAK is unusual in that it was free from the taint of Nazi political intervention in the sense that there was no involvement of the SS or political leaders. This is not to say that Rommel was antipathetic to Hitler—far from it, or that his command was free of attempted military interference. Rommel's strength was that he almost always ignored interference, took gambles and won. The desert war in particular is free of rumours of atrocities or cruelty outside the usual horrors of warfare. Both sides treated prisoners as well as they could in the circumstances, cared for each other's wounded and generally engaged in a chivalry of warfare that has been almost absent from the battlefield ever since.

It is well known that each side respected the other, and there are many records of surrendered troops on either side congratulating their opponents for a victory well and fairly won, and for the victors treating their captured foes with respect in the aftermath of battle. Not for nothing was Rommel respected by the British soldier who admired his skilful handling of his troops and the achievements of those troops with, usually, numerically inferior forces. In fact Rommel was held in such regard by the British troops that British military leaders in 1942 had to make a conscious effort to belittle him as a dangerous enemy.

Because the desert was a neutral battleground almost free from towns and with few inhabitants, the warfare was very pure—almost like a game of chess on which the pieces of war could be freely manoeuvred. This attitude permeated through both sides, and in no other theatre of war did both sides hum the same sentimental tune—'Lili Marlene', a German song popular in DAK which was also taken up by the British and Commonwealth forces, so that it became a common theme for all who fought under desert skies.

As a fighting force 21st Panzer reflected throughout the skill and dedication of its commanders and a professionalism typical of all German military formations of the first rank. Much initiative was shown at all levels. In keeping with German military training and there was all arms co-ordination that often made up for inferior numbers. Even in the hopeless situation of Normandy, where for the first day or two 21st Panzer was the only substantial German formation in the field. It gave a good account of itself. But lacking back-up in the opening hours, it was limited in what it could achieve despite brave fighting by men of the division.

Excluding actions in NW Europe in 1944-45 when 21st Panzer Division was pitched into Lattle against impossible odds, it enjoyed an enviable reputation as a highly successful formation, invariably well commanded both at divisional and corps level. In the Western Desert it only came off worse when the numerical disadvantage was huge, but even then, because of a certain amount of muddle and indecision on

JOHN FRY, 43, TOP TONY BUCKINGHAM





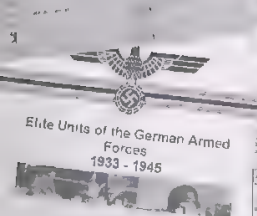
At the end of the desert fighting, the British were left with a few Panzer II and III tanks.

the British side, the division escaped being severely hoodied even when it expected to be. For example, at First Alamein a flank attack on 21st Panzer which could easily have cut off the divisions was not pursued with vigour and the division was able to make a withdrawal when it might, instead, have been annihilated. Similarly, stranded without fuel in the early stages of the Gazala battles it survived because the British forces, not appreciating the situation, held off.

Faulty staff work, timid tank handling and ill-thought out decisions on the British side were an undoubted aid to the DAK Panzer divisions and often compensated for their weakness in numbers. Allied with this was the bold instinctive handling by the corps commander, Rommel, whose legendary exploits often had a psychological affect on British morale. German Panzer divisions, including the 21st, scored over the British very often because of the German military philosophy of all-arms co-operation and organisation which allowed even small organic groups to be self contained as fighting units. All too often the British rigidity of operation meant that there was little or no true co-operation between infantry, artillery and armour. This was seen several times in the desert war when the British used defended boxes, largely unco-ordinated by infantry formations with no close by or integral armour support since the armour itself was located further back in the desert.

Even when the British used mobile formations they tended to be single arms such as armour with no accompanying infantry of any substance. The German formations, by contrast, included infantry, artillery and armour all working together. The Germans used their limited resources to the full. This is well illustrated by the use of the Flak 88 gun, which had been tried on occasions (and unofficially) in the anti-air role before 1941 but was used purposefully as an anti-tank gun once Rommel realised its range advantage and immense destructive power against British tanks. Even after it was proven from emplaced ground positions, notably at Halfaya Pass, the Germans did not leave it at that. Expediency during the early running tank battle showed that it could fire successfully from its wheeled carriage without being emplaced and the tactical advantage of that, first discovered by 21st Panzer Division, soon became a standard practice throughout the German Army. Throughout the rest of the war the Allies never really found an effective answer to the 88, whether it was used as a wheeled anti-tank gun or later fitted in late-war tanks. By contrast, inflexible British thinking never allowed the German practice to be copied even though the 3.7-inch AA gun, available in large numbers, was slightly better than 88. To the British it was designed as an AA gun and that was how it stayed.

REFERENCE



INTERNET SITES:

<http://www.tankclub.agava.ru/sign/sign.shtml>

Russian-language site with excellent illustrations of the tactical signs of the German army

<http://www.generals.dk>

This is an private project trying to provide biographical data on the army generals of World War II, including many German generals.

<http://members.nbci.com/dicemanrick/gerpg/ger1.htm>

Good general site that provides an orbital, information on equipment, some details of opponents and a history of 21st Panzer Division May-August 1944. Includes specific sections on: German Records for 21st Panzer Division and information on deciphering the tactical symbols. Weapons and Equipment of the 21st Panzer Division; 21st Panzer Division in 1:300 mode.

<http://members.nbci.com/dicemanrick/gerpg/shp/cs/index.htm>

The site above is part of the excellent Spearhead: France 1944 site. This features items for WWII miniature wargaming using the Spearhead rules by Arty Conliffe and other items concerning WWII history.



A collage featuring a stylized graphic of a soldier's helmet with a cross and a small map of Europe.



A collage featuring a stylized graphic of a soldier's helmet with a cross and a small map of Europe.

<http://www.livestore.com>



A collage featuring a stylized graphic of a soldier's helmet with a cross and a small map of Europe.

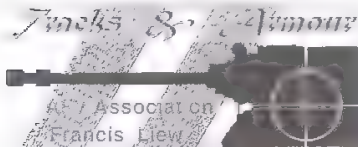
http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/8418/21pz.htm
 ing orbits and a brief history, this site is from Tracks and
 Armour's Armoured Formation Profiles, which include many more
 and At elements including most of the Panzer divisions. It
 udes information on the armed troops of all WW2 armies and
 135 a glossary on Panzer divisions.

A re-enactors' website for German units and dealers in re-enactor equipments. The 21st Panzer Division re-enactment unit is based in Southern California and is an active member of the California Historical Group. Unit members come from all over the West to participate in public events and battle re-enactments.

<http://www.panzer-modell.de/referenz/abzeichen/15bis22.htm>
Website of Panzer divisional and units signs and badges This site comes from www.panzer-modell.de

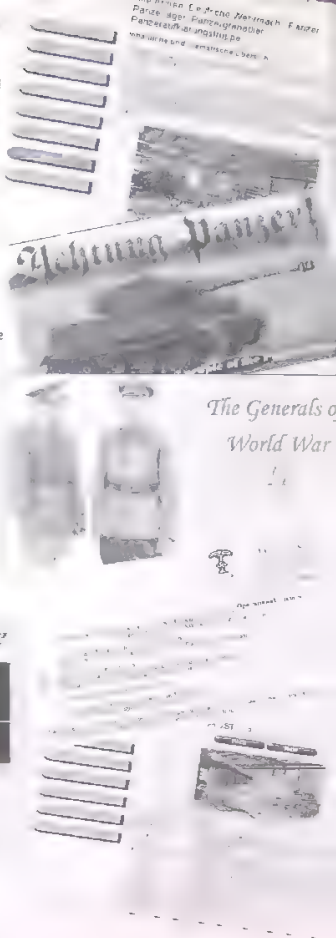
<http://www.panzermuseum.com/>
Panzermuseum Munster has 40 Wehrmacht vehicles from the 1934-45 era including Panzer I, II, III, IV, V Panther, VI Königstiger Sturmgeschütze, Jagdpanzer, Schützenpanzer, Spahpanzer

<http://www.fedgra.com/>
Comprehensive listing and info on German armed forces from 1919 to 1945



You are visitor number to drop by this web site
since 1st February 1997

1. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$

 $t = 45$ 

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnet, Corelli: *The Desert Generals*; William Kimber, 1960.

This famous book gives succinct accounts and analysis of the sequence of desert battles, and assesses the performance (and often the failings) of the various British commanders over the whole period. It is very interesting reading, though there is very little coverage of 21st Panzer Division individually.

Bender, R. James, and Law, Richard D.: *Uniforms, Organisation and History of the Afrika Korps*; R. James Bender Publishing, 1973.

Bender, R. James, and Odegard, Warren W.: *Uniforms, Organisation and History of the Panzertruppe*; R. James Bender Publishing, 1973.

These volumes are in the very thorough style associated with this publisher/author in that they have highly detailed coverage of units involved in Afrika Korps and Panzer troop operations, with comprehensive orders of battle and information on minor or little-known units involved. 21st Panzer Division is covered in both books, though only as part of overall coverage. There are lists of bravery awards, commanders, staff officers and other key personalities, most of whom are pictured. There are also many rare photographs of interest.

Bennett, Ralph: *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy 1941-45*; Hamish Hamilton 1989.

A good general history of how Ultra intercepts in the Mediterranean area were used or interpreted by British commanders (not always successfully) to aid the course of their campaigns. The desert war operations are only a segment of the book which does, of course, cover the course of World War 2 over

the whole Mediterranean region.

Carrell, Paul: *The Foxes of the Desert*; Dutton, 1961.

A good general account from the German point of view with personal experiences of DAK men and their viewpoint of battles and equipment.

Carver, Michael: *Tobruk*; Batsford, 1964.

A very comprehensive well written account of all the fighting for Tobruk and related battles in considerable detail, with well informed analysis by General Carver, who as a young officer, had personal experience of the desert campaign.

Ellis, Chris: *A Collector's Guide to the History and Uniforms of Das Heer: The German Army 1933-45*; Ian Allan Publishing, 1993.

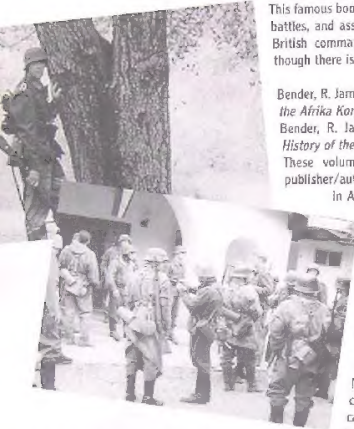
Short, pocket-sized guide to the German Army.

Ellis, Chris, and Chamberlain, Peter: *Afrika Corps 1941-42*; Almark, 1971.

A useful soft cover book covering all Afrika Korps operations in the Western Desert in pictorial form with sketch maps of the battles and some colour illustrations.

Forty, George: *The Armies of Rommel*; Arms & Armour Press, 1997.

Excellent survey of the people and equipment of the forces Rommel commanded throughout his career.



Top and Above: The men-at-arms of US-based 21st Panzer Division.



Above: Chris Ellis' guide to the history and uniforms of the German Army has been reprinted.

Forty, George: *Afrika Korps at War* (2 vols); Ian Allan Publishing, 1978. Excellent photos and personal stories. Recently reprinted.

Heckmann, Wolf: *Rommel's War in Africa*

An excellent account by a German writer who interviewed veterans of the North African campaigns, both German and British, 25 years ago when many were still alive. Contains many first-hand accounts, many from the German troops including 21st Panzer Division/5th Light Division members. Also has succinct accounts and maps of the main battles, also as seen from the German side. This book gives excellent insights into the whole period and is worth reading to get an idea of what it was like to be a soldier on either side involved in the desert fighting.

Jewell, Derek (Ed): *Alamein and the Desert War*; Sphere, 1967.

This was a well-illustrated paperback actually produced as a spin off from a *Sunday Times* series of 1967 commemorating the 25th anniversary of Alamein. It has contributions from several key participants including Montgomery. Apart from covering the desert campaign in popular readable style it has some good coverage of more social aspects such as life in the desert, life at base, popular songs and entertainment, army newspapers, propaganda, and so on.

Lewin, Ronald: *The Life and Death of the Afrika Korps*; Batsford, 1977.

A comprehensive account of the organisation and operations of DAK from start to finish in North Africa, including, of course, the activities of 21st Panzer Division. This is essential reading for full understanding of the DAK and its achievements.

Liddell Hart, B. H.: *The Tanks*, Vol 2; Cassell, 1959.

Volume 2 of the history of the Royal Tank Regiment includes coverage of the Western Desert, Tunisian and Normandy campaigns that involved 21st Panzer Division, with excellent battle maps and comprehensive coverage of the progress of battles. There is much comparison of British and German tactical and armament policies, but the emphasis is from the British point of view and the involvement of RTR units.

Moorehead, Alan: *The Desert War*; Hamish Hamilton, 1965.

A general history of the North African war as seen through the eyes of a distinguished war reporter who followed events at first hand. It gives a good impression of what the war was like from the point of view of British and Commonwealth forces, though coverage of the enemy forces is more generalised.

Nafziger, George F.: *The German Order of Battle* (2 vols); Greenhill 1999.

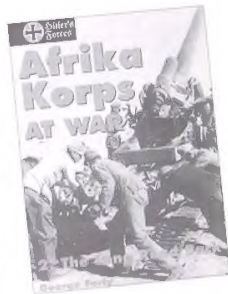
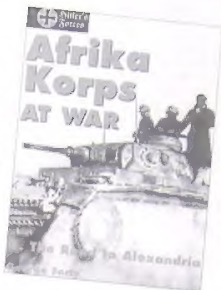
Comprehensive book covering the entire German Army, division by division.

Phillips, C. E. Lucas: *Alamein*; Heinemann, 1962.

A highly detailed account of all aspects of the battle, with many personal accounts and detailed operational maps, as well as fully detailed orders of battle for both sides. This is probably the most comprehensive account available.

Young, Desmond: *Rommel*; Granada, 1950.

An early biography by a distinguished officer who fought against (and was captured by) Rommel in the desert war. Apart from good coverage of his DAK command and operations it includes interviews with former colleagues of Rommel, including Johannes Streich.



Above: George Forty's *The Afrika Korps at War* (Vols 1 and 2) provide a fascinating series of personal accounts and photos.

INDEX

- Abyssinia, 6, 7, 40
 Agedabia, 21, 22, 23, 26
 Alam Halfa, 58, 59
 Alexandria, 37
 Amnir, I. von, 62
 Auchinleck, Sir C., 40, 41, 54, 58

 Bardia, 9, 29, 42, 55
 Bayeux, 68
 Beda Fomm, 18, 22
 Belhamed, 51
 Ben Gania, 23
 Benghazi, 9, 18, 22, 24, 25, 55
 Beresford-Pierce, N., 37, 40
 Bismarck, G. von, 56, 58, 59, 84, 86–87
 Böhm, 42
 Böttcher, K., 54, 84, 86
 Bouarada, 62
 Brauchitsch, W. von, 8, 21, 32, 37, 41
 British & Commonwealth Units
 1TR, 28, 29, 31, 34; 1st (NZ) Div, 41; 1st (SA) Div, 41; 1st Army Tk Brig, 41; 1st Guards Brig, 41; 2nd (SA) Div, 41; 2nd Arm'd Div, 21, 26; 2TR, 35, 36, 51; 32nd Army Tk Brig, 41; 3rd (BR) Div, 68; 3rd (CAN) Div, 68; 3rd (Ind) Mot Brig, 26; 3rd Arm'd Brig, 25; 3rd Arm'd Div, 26; 4TR, 36, 36, 38; 4th (Ind) Div, 38; 4th Arm'd Brig, 36, 41, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52; 5TR, 24, 26; 6TR, 24, 51; 6th (NZ) Div, 53; 7TR, 28, 34, 36, 38, 40; 7th Arm'd Brig, 35, 50, 51; 7th Arm'd Div, 9, 21, 22, 35, 38, 39, 41, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 56, 58; 7th Hussars, 51; 9th (Aus) Div, 25; 9th Arm'd Brig, 59; 11th Hussars, 35; 22nd Arm'd Div, 52; 22nd Guards Mot Brig, 35, 38, 41; 25th (NZ) Bn, 54; 60th Field Regt, RA, 51; Coldstream Guards, 36; Eighth Army, in passim 40–62; Guards Arm'd Div, 68; KDG, 20, 21, 25, 28; LRDG, 24; Western Desert Force, 9, 18, 37, 40; 41; XIII Corps, 18, 41, 48, 49, 50, 53, 59; XXX Corps, 41, 48, 49, 51, 59
 British Operations:
 'Acrobat', 56; 'Battleaxe', 37–40, 46, 48;
 'Bluecoat', 68; 'Brevity', 35–37; 'Crusader', 48–55; 'Lightfoot', 59; 'Supercharge', 59

 Caen, 65
 Campbell, Jock, 52
 Capuzzo, 29, 36, 38, 39, 86
 'Cauldron', The, 56, 57
 Churchill, W., 18, 37, 40
 Crüwell, L., 42, 50, 51, 53
 Cunningham, Sir A., 40, 41, 53, 54
 Cyrenaica, 7, 9, in passim 18–59, 87

 O-Day, 65
 Derna, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 32, 33, 56
 Dietrich, S., 68

 Egypt, 8, 9, 21, 29, 35, 47, 55, 58, 59
 El Aghella, 18, 20, 23, 56
 El Alamein, 56, 57, 58, 59, 84, 87, 95

 Falaise Pocket, 68
 Feuchtinger, E., 65, 66, 84, 88

 Fliegerkorps XI, 9
 Freyberg, B., 54

 Gabr Saleh, 49, 50
 Gambler-Perry, M. D., 22, 26
 Gambut, 47, 48, 52, 53
 Gariboldi, I., 24, 41
 Gause, Alfred, 41, 423
 Gazala, 25, 33, 35, 55
 Gebel Akkhar, 23, 24, 25, 28, 49
 German High Command, 6, 7
 German Units
 2nd MG Bn, 12, 17, 23, 29, 42, 43; 3rd Pz Div, 8, 10, 12, 72; 3rd Recce Bn, in passim 10–43, 49, 50; 5th Lt Div, in passim 10–42, 70, 72, 80, 85, 95; 5th Pz Div, 12; 5th Pz Regt, 12, in passim 17–62, 76; 7th Pz Div, 7, 84, 85; 8th MG Bn, 12, 17, in passim 21–30, 43; 8th Pz Regt, 36, 39; 10th Pz Div, 10; 12th SS Pz Div, 68; 15th MC Bn, 34, 42, 86; 15th Pz Div, in passim 10–62; 15th Pz Regt, 12; 16th Luftwaffe Fd Div, 68; 21st Pz Div, 13, in passim 42–68, 72, 85, 87, 88, 90, 92, 94, 95; 22nd Pz Regt, 68, 88; 33rd Flak Regt, 17, 38, 42; 39th Panzerjäger Bn, 10, 17, 43, 62; 75th Art Regt, 17; 90th Lt Div, 42, 56, 57, 58, 62; 100th Pz Regt, 65, 68; 104th PzGr Regt, 86; 104th Rifle Regt, 42, 43; 112th Pz Brig, 68; 125th PzGr Regt, 65; 155th Art Regt, 42, 43, 62; 155th Rifle Regt, 52; 192nd PzGr Regt, 65; 200th Rifle Regt, 52; 200th Sturmgeschütz Bn, 65; 220th Pz Pioneer Bn, 65; 305th Army Flak Bn, 62, 65; 605th Panzerjäger Bn, 12, 17; 606th Flak Bn, 12; 606th SP Flak Bn, 17; 931st Fast Brigade; Artillery Group Böttcher, 52; Battle Group Gruen, 62; Battle Group Pfeiffer, 62, 64; Battle Group Schuetze, 64; Battle Group Stenkhoff, 64; Battle Group Stephan, 51; Combat Group Knabe, 35, 36; Deutsches Afrika Korps, in passim 9–42, 72, 77, 84, 87, 90, 91, 94, 95; Panzerarmee Afrika, 62–64, 88; Panzergruppe Afrika, 41–62; Wireless Intercept Sect, 36
 Gott, W. H. E., 35, 36
 Graziani, Marshal, 8, 9
 Grolig, O., 68, 84, 88

 Hafid Ridge, 38, 39, 40
 Halder, F., 9, 18, 32, 41
 Halfaya Pass, 29, 36, 38, 39, 40, 46, 47, 90
 Hauser, U., 21, 30
 Heudick von, 42
 Hildebrandt, H.-G., 64, 84, 87–88
 Hitler, A., 6, 7, 8, 9, 24, 68, 83, 84
 Hilsen, H.-H. von, 64, 85, 88

 Italian Units:
 Ariete (Arm'd) Div, 23, 25, 26, 32, 42, 53, 56, 59; Bologna Div, 42; Brescia Div, 28, 42; Pavla Div, 42; Tronzo Div, 32, 42; Trieste (Mot) Div, 42; XX (Mob) Corps, 42; XXI Corps, 41, 42

 Kasserine Pass, 62, 64
 Kidney Ridge, 59
 Kirchheim, H., 22, 28, 31, 32
 Kluge, G. von, 10
 Knabe, G.-C., 54, 84, 86

 Langerhausen, Carl-Hans, 59, 84, 87

 Mareth Line, 62
 Mechili, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 38
 Mersa Brega, 21, 56
 Mersa Matruh, 6, 8, 35, 57, 58
 Montgomery, B., 20, 59
 Morhead, L., 25, 27, 28, 31
 Mssus, 23, 24
 Mussolini, B., 7, 8, 9, 23, 49
 Neame, P., 22, 25
 Neumann-Silkow, W., 37, 39
 Normandy, 64–68, 72, 84, 88, 95

 O'Connor, R. N., 9, 18, 22, 25
 OKH (Army Command), 6, 9, 16, 18, 21, 77, 31, 32, 41
 OKW, 6, 32, 35
 Olfrich, 23, 31, 36, 37

 Paulus, F. von, 32, 33, 35
 Ponath, G., 25, 28, 30, 31
 Prittwitz and Gaffron, H. von, 28–29

 Qattara Depression, 58

 Randow, H. von, 59, 62, 84, 87
 Ravenna, 68
 Ras al Madawar, 32, 33–35
 Rigel Ridge, 56
 Ritchie, Sir N., 54, 55
 Ravenstein, I. von, 37, 39, 47, 49, 52, 54, 84, 85–86
 Rommel, E., 7, 9, 16, 18, in passim 20–68, 72, 77, 82–84, 85, 86, 89, 90, 91, 95
 Ruweisat Ridge, 58

 Sibba, 62
 Schmidt, H. W., 27, 31
 Schmudt, R., 9, 20
 Schwerin, G. Graf von, 23, 24, 25
 Seebohm, A., 36
 Sidi Omar, 39, 46, 47, 48, 49
 Sidi Rezegh, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55
 Sidi Suleiman, 40
 Sidra Ridge, 56, 57
 Sirte, 20; Gulf of, 18, 20
 Sollum, 26, 29, 36, 38, 86
 Storch liaison aircraft, 23, 25, 26, 27
 Streich, J., 12, in passim 21–37, 84, 85, 86

 Thema, W. Ritter von, 8
 Tobruk, 9, in passim 23–55, 85, 86
 Tripoli, 9, 12, 16, 18, 20, 29, 32, 33, 56
 Tripolitania, 18, 20, 21, 23
 Tunisia, 62, 95

 Ultra, 18, 21, 35, 49, 94
 US Army Units: 1st Arm'd Div, 62

 Villers-Bocage, 68

 Wavell, Sir A., 18, 22, 35, 37, 40
 Wendt, W., 36, 39
 Westhoven, F., 68, 84, 88
 Williams, E. T., 20

 Zollenkopf, H., 68, 84, 88

DIVISION

21st Panzer Division



Formed in North Africa in August 1941 from the 5th Leichte Division, 21st Panzer fought in all the major battles of the desert war, including the Afrika Korps' advance to El Alamein, the fighting retreat to Tunisia, and operations against the American forces at Kasserine, until it was destroyed around Tunis in 1943. Reconstituted in France, 21st Panzer went on to fight in Normandy after D-Day until it was again almost completely annihilated in the battle of the Falaise Gap. Again reformed, 21st Panzer would end its days on the Eastern Front, where it surrendered to the Russians at Cottbus, southeast of Berlin, in April 1945. This varied and chequered history involves some of the fiercest fighting of World War 2 and makes 21st Panzer the ideal subject to start Ian Allan Publishing's new Spearhead series.

About the author

Chris Ellis has been writing about weapons and military history for 40 years for many publishers; his collaboration with Peter Chamberlain produced the classic *British and American Tanks of World War II*. More recent titles include monographs on the German Flak/Pak 88mm and the Schmeisser.

SPEARHEAD

Spearhead looks at the cutting edge of war, units capable of operating completely independently in the forefront of battle. The series examines the unit's:

- Origins and history
- Organisation, order of battle and how this changed
- Battle history, theatre by theatre
- Insignia and Markings
- Top people – biographies of commanders and personalities

Each book ends with an assessment of unit effectiveness - as seen by itself, its opponents and the wider viewpoint of history – and a full reference section including:

- Critical bibliography
- Relevant museums or exhibits
- Website links
- Re-enactment groups
- Memorials

ISBN 0-7110-2853-2



9 780711 028531

Printed in England

£12.99